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THE PLACE OF THE PYTHONS: Arthur J. Burks

THE REPAIRER OF REPUTATIONS:

Robert W. Chambers

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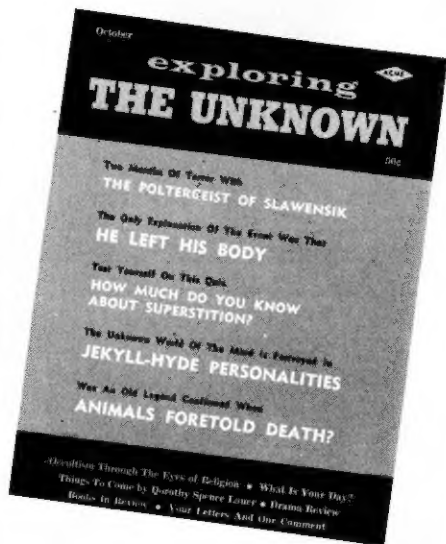
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MAGAZINE OF HORROR AND STRANGE STORIES

Volume 1

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, *Editor*

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Introduction

Commenting on the introduction to our first issue, Dr. Keller noted that it raises again a question which no one has answered to his satisfaction: What is the difference between a horror tale and a terror tale?

We cannot guarantee that our answer, long pondered over, will be satisfactory to the good doctor, either, but here it is: In our opinion, the two adjectives, while very similar, are not entirely synonymous, even though they are often used that way. Both relate to fear; both relate to an intensity of fear which may paralyze, sicken, even result in death. It seems to us that the difference—and it is a difference that can have meaning only to those who are willing to use the terms this way—lies in the nature of the phenomenon, living or unliving, which produces the fear.

I would say, then, that a terror tale might be one describing the fear, etc., of a person being stalked in the Asian jungles by a tiger; a horror tale might be one describing the fear, etc., of a person being stalked by a tiger in the hallways of his own apartment. A terror tale might describe the person hiding in a cave in the jungle while the tiger waits for him; a horror tale might describe the person closing his apartment door against the tiger—and the tiger turning the doorknob and opening it.

Many things accepted as natural are, nonetheless, terrifying; but the seemingly un-natural, then, is horrifying. When the Nazis re-introduced inhuman tortures as a part of daily life, this was horrifying; but to some of those who knew it was now "there" it reduced to terror.

Horror, then, lies in the un-natural (or seemingly so) where it is menacing and frightening. To our mind, "Luella Miller", in this issue, is a horror story; no psychological explanation can quite remove my shuddery feeling that this sort of thing should not be. And it seems to be something against which there is no defense, except distance. Dr. Keller's own famous tale, "The Thing In The Cellar" also strikes me as being pure horror. In many instances, though, stories will have both elements, and cannot be called purely one or the other.

Your comments, readers, will be most welcome.

Robert A. W. Lowndes

The Seeds Of Death

by David H. Keller

When an aficionado of imaginative literature refers to the "Good Doctor" these days, the gentleman is, of course, not the "Angelic Doctor," Saint Thomas Aquinas, but Isaac Asimov, Ph.D. But back in the days when Isaac himself was an eager reader, little more, the phrase "Good Doctor" referred to David H. Keller, M.D., who first appeared in Hugo Gernsback's **Amazing Stories** with a powerful tale entitled "The Revolt Of The Pedestrians." That was in January, 1928; before the year was out, Dr. Keller was firmly established as an author with a unique style and viewpoint, and he rapidly became a favorite, not only with science fiction readers, but also with those who avidly followed **Weird Tales**, for he broke into that market during the same year. He has done much medical writing, but the odds are that there is not too much overlap between his two audiences. A collection of some of his best science fiction, weird, fantastic, and psychological tales, "Tales From Underwood" is still available from Arkham House (Sauk City, Wisconsin) and their asking price, \$3.50, is modest indeed for 23 memorable stories. The present story does not appear in this collection, although it was anthologized in England many years ago. Its basic theme has been employed by other authors since, but none have quite approached the simple matter-of-fact horror of the Keller.

THE DUKE OF Murcia was distinctly unhappy. He had spent a year's income in entertaining one lady who had been so unappreciative that she departed for Paris at the end of

the week, leaving the duke absolutely alone in New York. The worst part about the whole affair was his gradually appreciating that she had engaged her passage a week before she

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by David H. Keller.

vowed eternal devotion to him. Irrespective of anything that he might do, the duke realized that his bankers would make him no further advances for at least another year. The world was indeed dreary. Other ladies would be impossible without more money.

The Spanish ambassador gave a very profuse denial to his telegraphed request for a loan. The hotel where he had luxuriated since his arrival in New York became suspicious and sternly asked for a settlement in full. Finally, the duke walked out on the sidewalk, a free man, but all of his baggage and much of his jewelry remained in the hotel. For the first time in his life the duke was without visible means of support. The manager of the hotel had promised to let him occupy his room for a few more days, but there were to be no more wonderful meals served there.

The duke visited a three-ball shop and pawned some jewelry that he had managed to conceal from the hotel management. Then he bought some hard bread and several evening papers and returned to his room. For the first time in his life he read over the "Help Wanted" section. This innovation was more successful than he had thought was possible. There was actually an advertisement in Spanish, asking for a personal interview, with pros-

pect of interesting service in Spain. A telephone number was given, which was to be used that evening only between the hours of eight and ten. This gave the duke ample cause for reflection as he munched the hard bread and drank ice-water.

It was a day of surprises. It started in the morning with the unexpected desertion of the lady and it ended at nine that evening with a visit from the gentleman who had inserted the advertisement.

James Garey lost no time in giving the reason for the visit.

"I am looking for a man," he said, "who is not afraid to die."

"You have found him!" answered the duke, shrugging his shoulders. "In my present condition I am better off dead than alive. Of course," he said reflectively, "it all depends on the manner of the death."

"That is the bad part of it, the New Yorker said. "I think that death is there waiting, but I am not sure of what form it takes. It is a peculiar story; in fact, it may be that you will find it even stranger than I do, or you may understand it. I had a brother who had everything in life to live for — and he went to Spain — to visit a lady there — and he never came back. Several other men that I have heard of have visited that lady, and they have never come back. The American ambassador to Spain has investigated the mat-

ter; in fact, he has personally been to see the lady, and his report is a most interesting one.

"She admits that these men have visited her, she even shows where they signed her guest book, and in every case she proves that in a few days they left her castle in their automobiles. She regrets their disappearance; she cries pathetically as she recalls how happy they were when they left and how they promised to visit her again on their return to Spain. The lady is very wealthy, belongs to one of the oldest families in Spain and, thus, there can be no question of robbery. She is said to be well chaperoned, as are all the Spanish ladies, and she made a very favorable impression on the ambassador; so much so that he scouted the idea of foul play.

"I loved my brother, and I believe that he died in that castle. I also think that the other men died there. So I am going to visit her, and I want you to follow me. Four days after I enter that castle I want you to visit the lady, and I want you to find out what happened to my brother. If I am alive, I will help you; if I am dead, it may make it easier for you to solve the problem of my brother, for the trail will be fresher. You will, of course, understand that you are likely to die in the same way that these other men have died."

"I WONDER IF I know the lady," the duke mused.

"It may be that you do. Her name is Helen Moyennes. She seems to have some kind of a title, lots of money, and she lives in a very old castle on the mountain top of Andora."

"Helen," replied the duke, "is not a Spanish name."

"Perhaps not, and, perhaps the only reason she is called a Spanish lady is because she lives in Spain. She is a brunette of uncertain age, and the ambassador, in a personal letter to me, commented on her beauty."

"I do not know her," said the duke. "I know a good many beautiful ladies, but not this one. The last one I knew left for Paris this morning with jewels that cost me a year's income. That is why I answered your message in the newspaper. I will go on this adventure with you. If the lady kills me, she will be the first lady who has done so. I suppose that this ambassador will provide me with letters of introduction, and you will have to get my clothes and jewelry out of pawn; at present, the hotel holds them as security."

"I will get them for you, and for the rest of your time in New York you may stay with me as my guest. I am busy in the daytime, but every night for the next week we will talk over our plans. We will leave for Spain in a week. In the meantime, I

will make you an advance of five thousand dollars, and you can go ahead and have as good a time as you want in the daytime. This may be your last visit to New York."

"You are not very cheerful."

"I have no reason to be. Frankly, I believe there is a good chance that I shall die in that castle; you may die there. I hope that one of us will clear up the mystery of my brother's death. Then, there are some more men, like Southward of Atlanta and Serriano of Boston. There is one odd thing about these men that have disappeared, and that is, they were all fine specimens of manhood, and they were all traveling by themselves. For some reason all were in automobiles without chauffeurs. They went to that castle; there seems to be proof that they left the castle — at least that is the statement that the lady and her servants make; and then they simply dropped out existence. How does it look to you?"

"I do not think they left the castle," answered the duke.

"Do you think that they are dead?"

"Either dead, prisoners, or so happy that they are willing to shut themselves off from all communication with the world."

The New Yorker shook his head. "They may be dead, or they may be prisoners, but these men are not staying there vol-

untarily. There are too many of them — they would be jealous of each other."

"Not if this Helen were a Messalina, or a Circe."

"No. She is not that. If she is, she has the ambassador badly fooled. Besides, I know my brother. He was not averse to a love affair with a lady, but he never would allow a rival in the field. If ever there was a jealous man in regard to the ladies, it was my brother. I can imagine him staying in that castle a lifetime with this Helen, but not a minute after he found out that there were other men there. If he is there, he is kept there, either dead or a prisoner."

"Time will tell about this Helen," sighed the duke. "You are sure she is beautiful?"

"Absolutely."

"That one fact makes the adventure attractive. Suppose you stop at the desk on your way out and rescue my trunks. Tonight I spend here. Tomorrow I come to your abode as your humble guest. A month from now we may dine in Paradise; but tonight I shall rest better if I have on my silken pajamas."

FOR THE NEXT week the evenings were spent in planning the Spanish adventure. A hundred suggestions were made, only to be discarded. Finally, they saw what they had dimly seen from the first. James Garvey would visit this lady as her

house guest. During those four days he would try to solve the mystery of his brother's disappearance. On the fifth day the Duke of Murcia would arrive at the castle. He would either meet James Garey or he would not. If he did not, then he could take it for granted that the New Yorker had fallen a victim to the same fate that had overcome his brother, the same that had been the undoing of Southward of Atlanta and Serriano of Boston, and other good men. One plan that was suggested was finally adopted. James Garey was to wear a ring with a large stone. This stone had a peculiar property. When rubbed against other stone or wood, it left no mark. When, however, the moist skin, as the palm or finger tips, rested on this place, a red stain appeared on the skin. The two men tried it, and when Garey carefully wrote "Death" on the top of the mahogany table and the duke carefully pressed the palm of his hand on this spot, then the word "Death" appeared in red letters on his hand.

"That works very well," commented Garey, "and the average person would believe that in this ring we had a very valuable way of communication, but, in reality, I doubt its real worth to us. I could not write messages all over a castle without being seen, and if I only wrote in a few places, you would never

know where those places were and would find them only by accident. If we both knew the castle, it would be different. As it is, the best we can do is presume that there is one special guest room, and if, when you come, you have the good fortune to be placed in the same room that I slept in, you will find a message from me on the wall above the door."

DURING THE NEXT week, the duke had to find some occupation for his days, the evenings being spent in apparently useless conferences with his fellow adventurer. The duke was a peculiar combination of globe-trotter, scholar, and libertine. Naturally, he drifted in these idle moments to Broadway and there, on the first day of his new life with Garey, a sharper fleeced him out of a hundred dollars by means of the old familiar shell game. One pea and three walnut shells and "You can see where I put the pea, gentlemen; now back up your confidence in yourself with a small bet." The duke was interested, and envious. It pained him to think that any one could work a trick like that on him; so he took the sharper into his confidence, showed him several unusual card tricks and offered him another hundred if he would teach him the trick. He saw possibilities in this as a valuable help in times of future

financial stringency, and he was confident that such times would come.

He spent several hours with the shell man and then started to practice. Again and again he flipped the pea where he wanted it. For the next six days he practically lived with a pea and three walnut shells in front of him on a table. He practiced on the servants in the Garey household and finally was able to deceive even the butler. Then he tried the game on his employer, and that worthy was willing to admit that it was impossible to keep his eye on the pea with any degree of accuracy. By the time the two men sailed for England, the duke was so proficient that he was able to make a considerable sum on the voyage — of course, in a very gentlemanly way.

The plan of action determined on by the two men was as follows: Garey was going to the castle in Andorra via Paris; the duke was to go by way of Barcelona. Their date of departure from London was so timed that the duke would arrive at the castle exactly four days after Garey. After leaving London, the two men were not going to communicate with each other. According to their program, the schedule seemed foolproof. As a final protection, a complete statement of the entire plan, with Garey's suspicions, and a complete program of the in-

tended investigation were sent in a sealed envelope to the American ambassador at Madrid, with the request that it be opened and acted on if neither Garey nor the Duke of Murcia called at the ambassador's office before a certain date.

The parting at London was rather dull. Both men were depressed. In the short time that they had been associated with each other they had developed a decided friendship. They were drawn together by a sense of impending danger. The duke became almost melodramatic in his profuse promises to leave no stone unturned to unravel the mystery and, if necessary, to avenge the threatened death of James Garey. So they said goodbye.

SOME WEEKS later the Duke of Murcia slowly drove his Isotta-Fraschini up the winding mountain road that led to the castle in Andorra, occupied by the fair Helen Moyennes. In his pocket he carried a letter of introduction from the American ambassador; on his Fedora a small bluebird feather shone in the cold clear sunlight; and in his breast his heart beat almost as fast as the slow explosion of his engine — for the path was so steep that even his powerful car was forced to go up on low gear. A little village huddled, as though in fear, at the bottom of this mountain.

The duke considered pausing a few minutes to obtain the reaction of these mountain folk to the grand lady who lived, in every way, above them, on the top of the mountain; however, he ended by driving through without a stop.

Accustomed though he was to Spanish architecture, this castle impressed him as being somewhat out of the usual, a castle so old as to be uninfluenced by the Moorish occupancy of Spain, a large pile of stone so massive that it towered above the peak, and yet the individual rock was so weather-beaten and covered with moss and fern that at some turns of the winding road it came into sudden view, not as a castle, but rather as a part of the ageless mountain. There may have been windows in the walls, but these were so narrow and the walls so thick that they showed as lines rather than modern apertures.

The duke had spent a few hours talking with a celebrated Spanish historian about this castle. The opinion given by this antiquarian was that the building was very old. In some respects the architecture was Norman; in other ways the Gothic influence showed; and the best description available included a row of columns that were said to be Roman. It seems that no one had occupied the place for many years, and

then this very rich lady, Helen Moyennes, had bought the place and had now lived there for five years. No one that the duke talked to in Madrid seemed to know much about this new owner of the castle. Even the police department had no knowledge of her past and very little of her present. She spent money lavishly and was very prompt in paying her bills. Also, in some way, she had powerful political influence. That was all that the duke found out about her.

Now, he was going up to the castle and, for all he knew, he might never come down again.

All the men that had gone up that road had been well educated; some of them had, by their personal efforts, become rich. There was not one fool among them, and yet, none of them had come back.

What had happened to them? Were they staying there in the castle from choice?

Or were they dead?

HE CAME NEAR the top of the mountain just as the sun was sinking for its long night's rest. Streaks of light hovered in long neurasthenic fingers on the castle walls, throwing the ancient rocks into every possible shade of syncopating grays. A low wind, moaning upward from the valley, whined miserably around the massive walls. The road came to an abrupt

pause before a great gateway with a Gothic arch, its deep shadows showing the wonderful thickness of the walls. The gate was shut. The engine pattered to a pause, and silence hovered over the castle, with the downy wings of twilight teasing the anxious mind to thoughts of depressed mystery.

The duke had, in his youth, received an excellent literary education. Now, lines from the deep well of his subconscious came over his mental threshold — Childe Roland to the dark tower came — fee, fi, fo, fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman — and blew his horn! Without being really aware of what he was doing he looked in back of him to see if there was room to swing his automobile around and start down the hill. There was no one there to see him; apparently his arrival had not been noticed. While he was thinking these thoughts, he saw the great gate divide in the middle and slowly swing open. Apparently he had been seen and the way had been provided for him to drive into the courtyard.

Starting the car, he glided into the courtyard and stopped. A noise made him look backward, and the gate was already closing.

"The lady wants to keep me," the duke muttered to himself.

And then an old woman came from a little doorway toward

the car. In Spanish she asked him to follow her. He pretended not to understand, and she repeated the request in very good English. The duke shrugged, and thought that it was very much like a page out of Perrault's fairy-tales.

THE OLD DAME took him to a bedroom that was a curious combination of the very old and the ultramodern. For instance, a completely furnished bathroom provided every possible convenience to the dusty traveler. A sad-faced valet was in attendance, and the duke's baggage had been brought up with him and was being unpacked by the black-clothed servant. The sound of running water assured him that a bath was being drawn. As in a dream, he heard the servant ask if he wished to be shaved or would he prefer to shave himself. It was all perfect.

Half an hour later another sad-faced man entered and asked him if he was ready for supper. It seemed that the Lady Moyennes awaited the duke's pleasure in the supper room. Somehow it did not seem real to the duke. There was too much regularity to it, too much that he could not understand. It seemed as though he were an actor in a play that went too smoothly — ah! That was it! It had to be well done, because it had been so often done by these servants — how often had that

sad-faced valet drawn the bath for some bright-faced, anticipating young man who sought adventure and love in Andorra? Where were those young men now? And would he play the same part in the tragedy that they had played?

He told the butler that he would be ready in a few minutes and took one of his suitcases into the bathroom and closed the door. There was an automatic in that piece of baggage, but when he took it up and looked at it, he found that all of the cartridges had been taken out. He could not believe that this had happened since he arrived at the castle. Was it possible that a confederate in the hotel in which he had passed last night had made him defenseless? At least, this was the first sign of danger, and was depressingly suggestive. He was glad that he had that dagger in its leather case, strapped to his leg under his trousers. It would not be as useful as a revolver, but in a pinch he could use it to good advantage. At least, it made him feel better to have it strapped on his leg. Going into the bedroom, he told the butler that he was ready to follow him to the supper table.

IN A ROOM that was so small that a charming sense of intimacy was possible, but with so high a ceiling that the candles failed to show any of its

detail, the Lady Helen Moyennes awaited the Duke of Murcia. The aristocratic Spaniard was well acquainted with the beauty of the feminine world, but even his blase soul was aroused by the superb woman who faced him. He dimly felt that she was tall, but there was a delicacy about her that minimized her height. Her closely fitting décolleté ensemble showed a form that was almost massive, and, still, there was but little indication of the tremendous strength that must be associated with such a powerful body. All this and a hundred other thoughts flashed through the duke's mind as he bent forward to kiss her outstretched hand. Her long fingers, ending in pointed nails, gathered together his varied, fragmentary thoughts into a harmonious whole.

He thought to himself, "This woman is a tiger. All ladies are cats, but this beautiful one is a supercat."

If Lady Helen had any other thought save that of bored politeness, she did not show it in her attitude. In a minute they were at the small table, set for two.

"I always have the service set for a guest," explained the languid woman. "Life here is dull, but now and then, from all over the world, very exceptional people drop in on me; so I am always prepared. Day and night

a watchman is on the wall. When an automobile arrives at the gate, he has orders to open it. After it is in the courtyard, there is time enough to learn the business of the occupant with me. Of course, important guests like yourself are always anticipated and prepared for. It is necessary to do this, especially in regard to the food. You realize that most men enjoy good meals, and the habits gastronomical of different nations are so different.

"You are my first Spanish guest. Is that not odd? Men from England and Italy and even a very wonderful Turk, to say nothing of those charming but rather blunt Americans, have visited me, but never till this evening have I had the pleasure of entertaining a real member of the Spanish nobility. Naturally, when I heard that you were arranging to see me, I wondered what I could do to make this visit one that you would remember — it seemed to me that a man with your sense of beauty needed something more than a heavy supper; so, I thought it would be fitting to make you a little present, even before you taste the grapefruit. Manuel, bring in that silver casket, and place it before the duke."

A massive jewel case was placed on the snow-white linen cloth.

"Now, my dear duke," almost

purred Lady Helen, "when I heard that you were on your way to see me, I thought that it would be best to give you jewels — not just ordinary jewels, but some very fine ones that would have a special significance to you; so I arranged to obtain some in Paris. A very notorious young lady arrived there a few weeks ago, and I obtained some from her that she had brought from New York. You are so fond of jewels, perhaps you may have seen these before? Also, there is a ring."

THE PUZZLED duke opened the lid of the jewel case and carefully examined the individual pieces. It did not take long for him to recognize them as the ones that he had spent a year's income on. And, at the bottom of the box, a ring. Of course, there are often many rings in the world that look exactly alike, and yet, as the duke looked at it, he was struck at the resemblance to the ring worn by James Garey. But this was no time to betray himself by any outward show of anxiety or of perplexity. He slowly broke into one of those famous smiles that made him such a charming favorite with the other sex.

"You have conquered me!" he exclaimed. "I never could resist jewels. Courtesy on my part demands that I accept this gift,

and I am sure that your sense of pity for a beauty-starved man will make you willing to grant my request and wear these jewels during the rest of my visit. When I take them with me, they will be all the more precious to me because you have worn them, at least, for a little while. This ring, however, I will at once put on and cherish, for there will be hours, as your guest, that convention will deny me the sight of your smile, and, during those lonely hours, the wearing of this ring will comfort me till you again dispel the midnight of my sorrow with the dawn of your fair face."

"I think that was very nicely said," replied the Lady Helen. "I am beginning to regret the wasted years during which I never even realized how charming a true Spaniard could be. I feel that my cosmopolitan tastes have played me false, and in my search for a real man I have been unfortunate enough — and met you only tonight."

They smiled at each other, and began to eat.

Soon he selected a bracelet and begged for the opportunity of personally placing it on her wrist. In touching her skin he felt a warm, vibrant, tingling thrill that roused the slumbering silences of his masculine ego.

Again she smiled on him, as she said, "For years I have been looking for a real man."

Lazily leaning toward her he whispered, "I trust that from tonight on you need no longer look."

"I want a man that will gamble with life — and love."

"You have found that man."

"I am in great trouble."

"I will share it with you."

The meal finally ended — with the butler discreetly absent, no chaperone in sight, and a close harmony already existent between the woman and the Spaniard, who was already wondering just what the end would be of the game that he was playing. However, he did not wait long, for she suddenly asked him to excuse her. She was tired and felt that he was also fatigued with the events of the day. She promised to see him on the morrow and to confide in him, to tell him her troubles, but, just now — a white arm stretched toward him, a white hand rested on his to receive his nocturnal salutation — and then the butler appeared to escort him to his bedroom.

DULLY, HE CLOSED the door. He found the valet waiting and told him that there was nothing more for the night. After the servant had left, he locked the door and lit several candles. Carefully, he examined the plaster on each side of the doorway. It was scratched with the wrinkles of antiquity. He

placed his hands first on one place and then another against the wall, and, after each pressing, looked carefully at the palm. Finally, a red mark appeared on the skin. He replaced the palm exactly over that piece of plaster and held it there while he counted thirty. This time a little flag showed on his palm, and it was a red flag. The red flag of danger! The duke laughed silently. He did not need a red flag to tell him of the danger he was in. Poor old James Garey — he had meant well — but where was he now? A sudden thought came to him. He took the ring on his finger and carefully wrote the word "Danger" on the white plaster. When he had finished, there was no mark visible, but when he pressed against it with his palm, the word appeared in red letters on his moist skin.

There was no mistake. On his finger was the ring that James Garey had worn when he entered the castle. He had worn it long enough to trace the warning flag — perhaps he had tried to leave other message; — but now the ring was on another man's finger, and where was Garey? How much did this devil of a woman know? She had known about his buying those jewels for the woman in New York, and had been able to anticipate his visit in time to recover those jewels and give them to him. Of course, it was

a left-handed gift. She could take them away from him — but that was not what was worrying him. How did she know about the woman who went to Paris? In what way had she found out that he was going to visit her? She must have known that almost before he and Garey left America. Any one could see that the very fact that she gave him Garey's ring showed that she had a fair idea of what that ring could be used for.

With a deep sigh, the duke undressed and went to bed. Garey was either dead or alive, according to the whims of this woman. So were all the other young men who had been drawn to this castle by rumors of the wondrous beauty of the owner. "Well," reflected the Spaniard, "tomorrow will tell the tale. The tigress must have some weak spot. But what in the name of all the holy saints is her reason? What is she? A real woman, or a salamander?"

The morning came, and with it the sad-faced valet, a bath and a very remarkable breakfast served in the bedroom. Later came a message from the lady. She had heard that the duke could drive a car. Would he object to showing her his ability? The duke did not object, but for the next three hours teased death a thousand times on the steep roads, bordered on one side by high mountains and on the other side by ravines that

seemed to have no landing-place. As one thrill followed another, the woman by the duke's side became enthusiastic.

"You can drive a car!" she purred. "I think you are a real man."

FINALLY THEY returned to the castle. The lady, pleading indisposition, begged to be excused, but promised to meet the duke at the supper table. There, dressed in an Oriental fantasy of laces and pearls, she appeared more charming than ever. But it was not her beauty, nor yet the excellent food, that impressed the duke; rather it was a flower that she wore on her corsage. This flower, though its stem was blood-red, had white petals, almost dead-white, and thick, as though made of wax. The stamens and pistils were red, but that was not the remarkable thing about them. They were long and seemed to move caressingly over the white bust of the Lady Helen Moyennes. And when the ends of the red stamens touched her skin, the woman seemed to be pleased.

For a while the duke thought that he was imagining all this — he did not wish to be impolite by looking too long at the flower and at the low-cut gown that it was pinned on. He shivered. It was fastened by a gold snake. Perhaps it would be best for him not to drink any more.

Of course, it was just a gold snake, but — damn it! — what made the eyes glitter that way?

The lady noticed his close attention. She laughingly asked, "Do you like my flower?"

"It is beautiful because of its location. May I ask the name?"

"I do not know. I have a few plants growing here. Occasionally one blossoms and then I wear it, though often I prefer the blossom to go to seed. Do you like it? Would you like to see one grow? You may if you stay here. I should like to have you do that. You are a real man. For years I have wanted a real man — one who could make me love him and fear him and shrink under his wild caresses. Some of the men who have visited me have been such gentlemen that they bored me."

"I think I should like to see the plants," answered the duke. "And, under certain circumstances, life might be very pleasant here."

"If once you saw the plants, you would want to stay. You are like all the other men — so jealous! But we have come to the end of the supper. You were so busy watching my orchid that you did not eat much. It is early; let us go to another room and play a game of cards. Do you know any new game of chance?"

The duke thought of his three walnut shells. He excused himself and, guided by the butler,

went to his bedroom to get them. On his return, the Lady Helen preceded him to a small room. It is interesting to note that during the days that the duke stayed at the castle he never learned its geography sufficiently to find his way without a guide.

THE LADY awaited him in a small room, hung with black velvet drapes. The floor was covered with a carpet so thick that the silent footfalls sounded like the ghostly steps of pedestrians long dead. In the center of the room a small card table and two chairs provided ample furniture for a card game. On one side of the table an iron stand provided support for an ash-tray of jade. Even as he was sitting down, the duke saw that this iron was shaped like a dragon, a rather hideous feminine dragon, with red eyes; he wished those eyes did not stare that way.

So, between cigarettes, the two showed each other tricks of cards and walnut shells, and, finally, of very proper, almost sedate, early Victorian love. Lady Helen was fascinated by the shell game. She finally admitted that the duke's ability was too much for her.

Pleased, he boasted, "The hand is quicker than the eye."

That night, on returning to the room where his valet awaited him, he quickly shut and

barred the door. He kept the servant busy with a few odd tasks while he took off his evening clothes and put on a more comfortable soft-collared shirt and slippers. Then, almost before the valet knew what happened, the duke had him on the floor with the sharp point of a very business-like dagger pressing against his throat.

"Now, you can get me the ammunition for my gun," he whispered.

"Your gun is loaded, sir."

"You are a liar!"

"No. The next morning after you came, she told me to load it."

The duke carefully searched the man to see that he had no weapons, and then, with the dagger still pressed against his jugular vein, made him walk over and open the traveling-bag. A second's inspection satisfied him that the man had told the truth. The revolver was loaded. That only served to give the duke one more thing to think about.

He replaced the dagger in his leg sheath, having far more confidence in a gun. Then he told the valet to sit down in front of him. The time had come for a cessation of courtesies, the duke carefully explained to the valet.

"I am satisfied that you know a great deal about this place," continued the duke. "I am going to speak very slowly, so you will be sure to understand my mean-

ing. I am confident that you have served all the gentlemen who have visited your mistress. Probably the same program is rendered for each of us. Now, you have your choice: you can either tell me all about it or you can have me slit your throat. What about it?"

"I will tell you all I know, sir."

"You will?"

"Yes, I will tell everything."

"Why? What is the reason for your eagerness? A good servant would die rather than betray his madam."

"She told me years ago that whenever this sort of thing happened, I should always tell."

"So, other men have threatened you?"

"Yes, sir! Mr. James Garey bruised me severely."

"I see. And where is Mr. Garey now?"

He saw a change come into the man's eyes. He seemed to be looking over the duke's head. And just then the Spaniard sensed a strange perfume and felt a soft hand on his shoulder as her voice said, "Why not have me tell you?"

He whirled in his chair and faced Helen Moyennes.

She smiled at him, and even in his worried rage he saw that it was a tender, solicitous smile, a pleasant comprehensive smile that should have disarmed his suspicions.

"You are a little like all the other men, Ferdinand, Duke of

Murcia. I tell you that I am in trouble and that you can help me and, at once, you think the worst things about me that you can and try to corrupt or threaten my servants. Why were you not frank? I gave you jewels. I even offered to share everything with you — for the rest of my life. I am afraid that I love you, Ferdinand."

The Spaniard looked at her. He felt that she was either speaking the truth or was a wonderful actress.

"I think that I shall call your bluff, Helen Moyennes," he answered. "If you will tell me the mystery of the missing men and give an explanation that is satisfactory to me, I will accept it as proof of your love, and I think that you are beautiful and lovely enough for me to spend the rest of my life with — and when I love a woman, I usually satisfy her."

"That would suit me. I think that when I tell you my story, you will understand. Of course, the men are dead — at least, most of them — but if they wanted to kill themselves, am I to blame? Come into my private rooms, and let me tell you about it."

"I will, but this valet goes along."

"To what purpose? What does he know that I can not tell you?"

"And you are going to tell me everything?"

"Everything."

The Spaniard followed the woman into her room. His dagger had been replaced in its leather case, but he held the revolver in his right hand. He was very careful, walking down the long hall; he did not favor a knife-thrust from behind in the dark.

Once in her bedroom, he sat with his back to the wall; no confederate of this tigress was going to get the best of him! From that place of security he noted, for the first time, that since supper time the lady had changed her dress. Now she had on a white lace negligee that gave a general impression of extreme intimacy. In fact, the duke felt that it was intended to impress him — to pity, perhaps, to other more subtle emotions. The orchid that she had worn at supper was now in a vase on the center table.

"You are so odd, Ferdinand," began the lady. "Please put that revolver away, or I shall scream. What do you want to do? Shoot me? Of course, you could do that, but how explain matters to my servants or the American ambassador? Do you know him? He certainly is a dear. He came here to investigate me, and I really believe that had he been younger and not so great an official, he would have remained here — longer. At least, he gave me a wonderful recommendation. He sent me a copy of it,

and I could see that he was shocked at the way people were talking about me. A lone woman must be very careful. In fact, she must be above suspicion, and when I told the ambassador my story and showed him my guest book, why, the only thing for him to do was to think that these dear boys had accidentally driven their cars over one of our precipices.

"I came here some years ago, and bought this castle. I spent a large sum in making it suitable as a residence for the best kind of people. Of course, I hoped that now and then I should have company; so I prepared a series of guest chambers. There were any number of old four-poster beds, and I had these put into the new guest rooms and, at last, I began to be known, just a little; people in Paris and Moscow and New York began to whisper about this castle, and finally a man called from Moscow.

"He was a nervous fellow, always putting things in his mouth. One day we were walking through the forest and we saw some red seeds on the ground, near the skeleton of a horse. They looked exactly like pomegranate seeds. This Russian nobleman put some in his mouth and that night he became unconscious. Of course, I was sure that his friends would think that I had poisoned him. After some weeks of unconsciousness,

he died. I went back to the forest and picked up all the seeds that were scattered around, and I brought them back and planted some, and they would not germinate. The more I worried, the worse I felt, and just when it seemed that I could not bear the suspense any longer, a man by the name of Southward from an American town, called Atlanta, came to see me. He had heard of me in Paris.

"I was young then, and I thoughtlessly told him about the Russian and asked him to help me unravel the mystery. He was a doctor, this American, and he asked me to let him see the seeds. I showed them to him and he examined them. He cut one open and looked at it through a pocket microscope, and finally he said that it was just a hard seed, and he said that it was like a pomegranate, and that it was not the cause of the Russian's death, because it would never be dissolved in his stomach — it was too hard; and he thought the man had died of a disease he called uremia. I cried and told him how relieved I was to know all this, and could he prove it to me — if he could, he would win my everlasting gratitude. What did he do but at once put a seed in his mouth and swallow it! And he became unconscious and died — just like the Russian. And that made two.

"The affair shadowed my life. It made me broody, introspec-

tive. I was no longer the gay girl that had come so buoyantly to this castle in search of adventure.

"And then the blossoms came, and of all the things in my life that I have had, those wonderful blossoms were the most precious. You saw me wear one to-night at supper. At present, it is on the table. When I have one, I am a different woman — without one, I am sad, depressed and aged. So now I had two things to live for, one to solve the mystery of the seeds and the other to have a plentiful supply of blossoms.

"JAMES GAREY was the first man who acted in the least bit unfriendly. I knew that you were going to come, and I knew that he would accuse me of the death of his brother. Naturally, I was prepared; yet I determined to be honest with him and tell him the whole story. He decided to kill me, but at the last he said he would give me a gambler's chance. He had the idea that the red seeds had killed his brother. I showed him a bottle full, and, at the same time, allowed him to compare them with real seeds of the pomegranate. He said there was a little difference; so we put a red seed and a pomegranate seed on the card table and cut for the low card. The high card allowed the fortunate one to swallow the pomegranate seed,

while the one who cut low was to swallow the seed that he felt was so poisonous. I cut low; so I swallowed the red seed and he took the harmless seed, and in a few hours he was silent in the embrace of the slowly approaching death. You notice I am still alive? So, something else killed Garey? What?"

The duke smiled. "Perhaps. Or, at the last moment, you switched the seeds on him."

"No. He was fortunate. He won out in the cards. Do you know, he followed me around as long as he could walk, and, of course, waited to see me become a hopeless cripple, and you should have seen the look of hopeless terror on his face when he found out that he could not walk or talk. He gambled with death and lost.

"So, one and all, those brave boys are dead?"

"No. Garey is still alive, and one or two others, but the rest are really dead."

"Lady Helen Moyennes. You are a liar! If I thought that you were telling the truth, I would kill you right there. I would fill that lovely body full of bullet holes. But you are trying to deceive me. You are either insane or a great actress. I should not be surprised to have the door open and all these former lovers of yours walk in as the animals did at Circe's banquet. Such a tale as you tell! For children or fools."

"I am not a liar. Here is a bottle filled with seeds, and — why, there is one of the flowers!"

"The flowers?" asked the duke. "What in the name of the holy saints has the flower to do with the seed?"

"The seed finally matures the flower and the bloom is what I live for."

"But — I do not understand?"

"You will when you see the men. Come with me. Suppose we see James Garey first. He will have his eyes open, but he is really unconscious; at least, it is best to think so."

THE LADY LED the Spaniard into a guest room. Passing down the hall, he recognized at least one fact, that he was passing by the door of his own room. Then they entered the next room. Fool that he was! Had Garey been separated by only a wall from help all the time since the duke had arrived? They entered the room, and the duke saw that in practically every detail it was furnished like his own. And Garey was on the bed.

His eyes were open. He was in pajamas, and but lightly covered with a white silk sheet. On his face was a puzzled look. Without looking at the woman by his side, the duke took the sick man's hand. It was warm. The man was breathing, but the arm, when released, dropped flaccid on the bed.

"Garey! Garey! Don't you know me?" the duke pleaded.

The soul seemed to answer in Garey's eyes. The soul, and nothing else.

The duke's finger nervously touched the trigger of the revolver.

"Don't shoot me yet," jeered the tigress. "Wait till you have seen the rest of them. Let us go into the other rooms."

In the next room another man lay on the bed in the same paralyzed attitude.

The lady said in a low voice, "This is a South American. I was so disgusted with him that, in some way, he swallowed a seed with his salad. He has lost a good many pounds in the last week. If I were not sure of his loss of sensibility, I should think from his expression that he was in pain."

In the next room the woman paused to turn on the electric lights. "If you look at this man closely, you will see that he also is still alive but not doing very well. See the little green tendrils coming out of his mouth and nose? The root formation has now reached a point at which the plant is able to reach the surface. Naturally there is a profound disturbance of all of the vital organs.

"Let us go into the next room. A lovely boy, Serriano of Boston, is there. A Greek god he was when he came here, and I would have saved him if I could, but

he was so stubborn. Let's pass through this connecting door. See how thin his face is and shrunken his arms? But the plant is growing rampant. It is sending up its branches over the bed-posts and down over the floor. See the little buds? In another two weeks the blossoms will appear. I am sure that Serriano has been dead for some days. I loved that boy, and I am so glad that he did not suffer.

"In this next room is the reason for your being here. Yes, you have guessed it — the brother of Garey. A surprise awaits you. Come through this door. Do you notice this odor? Have you ever had an experience like this? The most wonderful orchid in all the world, my passion flower."

ON THE BED in this room was what had once been a man. Now he seemed little more than a bag of skin and bones, but the room was filled with rustling, swaying vines, and a dozen flowers, like those the tigress had worn on her corsage, filled the room with a cloying fragrance that was almost unearthly and unendurable. The Lady Helen took one by the stem and held it near her bosom, and at once the pistils began tenderly to brush the skin.

She laughed. "See? My darlings know me. How glad they are to have me near! The others

are disappointed, jealous. They want to love me, too."

"So that is Garey's brother?" the duke asked slowly.

"Yes. He was a fine man. So far, he has produced more blossoms than any I have ever had. But let us see the others. Suppose we skip two or three rooms and go to the last room? That will give you an idea of the end, and I know you will agree with me that it is not so bad, not so very bad."

This last room was furnished like the others, but the plant was dead. The thing that had been a man was now dried leather, cracked and broken. Between the cracks could be seen the dead, dried roots that had eaten him, till nothing remained; and these had then died of hunger. On the bedposts, over the floor, the dead leaves lay in dry rot. But the seed pods hung, a plentiful harvest, from the end of many a stem.

"Here we reap the harvest. This is the man from Moscow. Tomorrow I will come with my glass bottle and save every seed and have the room clean and precise for the next visitor."

"There will be no tomorrow and no more visitors!"

"So this is the end?"

"Precisely!"

"Then, let me go gather some of the flowers from Garey — for my funeral."

THEY RETURNED to the

room where the massive blooms filled the air with the odor of ethereal decay. Gently the lady broke off half a dozen, but, in spite of her care, the torn stems bled and covered her white negligee with blood. She pressed the bouquet to her face, and the duke shuddered as he saw dozens of long twitching stamens caress her cheeks and eyelids.

"Now we will go back to any of your rooms," commanded the duke, "and you can prepare to join Garey."

"At least, it will be a pleasure to die at the hands of such a gentleman. I am sure that it will give you a thrill to kill a defenseless woman."

"It will give me a great joy."

Still smelling the flowers, she sauntered to the card room.

Seated at one chair, she begged the duke to occupy the other. The card table was between them.

"So, you are going to kill me?"

"No. On second thought, I am going to tie you up and take you in my car to Madrid, and there I am going to turn you over to the authorities."

"They will never believe you."

"They can come and see for themselves."

"By that time my servants will have all the rooms clean and fresh. Ferdinand, you are a fool. You know you can not make the people in Madrid believe you. You had better kill me here. Of course, you can not

get out of the castle alive. Right now a half-dozen guns are pointed at your heart. Why not be a sport? Let's compromise. You write a letter to the American ambassador that you and James Garey are leaving for Nice and that you know everything is all right here. Then, we will play a game of cards. If I lose, I will take one of my own seeds and you a pomegranate. I have one of those fruits here. I will let you cut it open and satisfy yourself that there is no fraud. I will call in my men and tell them that if you win, they are to give you safe passage. I understand you are a gambler - let's try fate. Select your own game."

"I will do that little thing," said the duke smiling, as he reached in his pocket for the three walnut shells. "Let me cut the pomegranate. I want to look at those seeds. Put one of your seeds beside it. God! They are alike. Now, call your men and tell them your orders, and we will begin."

THE LADY CLAPPED her hands, and from behind the velvet curtains stepped six men. She had not lied. She told these six that she and the duke were playing for high stakes, and if she lost they were to let the man go free. She called for pen and ink and paper and had the duke write to the American ambassador about the trip to Nice.

Then she told the six men that they could leave the room.

"You will learn in eight hours who won," she told them, "but if this guest wins, let him go free. If I win, we will have you take the letter to Madrid. Now, Ferdinand, explain this new American game."

"I have here three half walnut shells," began the duke. "I will use a pomegranate seed. I will give you three chances to tell under which shell I put the seed. Best two out of three wins. If I win, I eat a pomegranate seed, and you one of those seeds of death. If you win, the tables will be reversed. I warn you that the hand is quicker than the eye."

"I will have some wine brought," commented the Lady Helen. "We will need something to wash the seeds down. My mouth is dry already. Is it not queer, fantastic, that I can not stand excitement? Feel my hand, how it shakes."

"I do not care to feel your hand."

"A few hours ago you said that you loved me."

"I love you as I do death. Come. Be a sport. Do you understand the rules? Good! Now watch me closely as I wave my hand over the shell. There! It is now under one. Which one? The right end? Wrong. It was in the center. Now again. Watch me. This is your life at stake. Now, which one? The

center? Wrong again. It was on the left side. You have lost twice and you pay. Now is the time for my gun. Here is the glass of wine. Take a seed out of that bottle and swallow it. One false move and I blow your brains out. Now I will dig out one of these pomegranate seeds and drink it down with wine. Now, we each have a seed. I understood you to say that it worked in eight hours? So, we will sit here till morning. If you move, I will kill you anyway. I am not going to leave you till I know that you have started the long road that those brave young fools took. You had a good time, but now your time has come to an end."

Sighing, the lady put down her glass.

"So, this is the end?" she said. "Well, have you any objection to my playing solitaire? Some men would have liked to hold me in their arms these last eight hours of life, but you are so different, Ferdinand. At times, you seem to be unnecessarily cold. It is better to die than to live a lifetime with you. You would not satisfy."

SHE STARTED TO play solitaire. Hour after hour she shuffled and dealt. Four hours passed and then five and six. She had not spoken, but the duke noticed that her movements were gradually becoming

slower, and at times she swayed in her chair as though she were drunk.

At last, his curiosity overcame him. "Do you feel sick?" he asked.

"I feel very peculiar. I think that soon I shall be unable to play."

He watched her carefully. Seven and a half hours passed and she just sat there motionless, looking at him with glazed eyes. Sighing and tired, he took his revolver and placed it in his pocket; then, folding his hands on the table, he waited for the end.

He judged that the eight hours were up and started to look at his watch; but his hands stayed folded on the table. He tried to get up, and he just sat there.

Then the woman stretched; like a lazy cat she stretched her long bare arms above her head and yawned.

"It has been a long, tiresome night, Ferdinand," she said. "You look sleepy yourself. That was an interesting game you played. Your idea that the hand was quicker than the eye is right. You never did see me plant those seeds in a pomegranate or palm a harmless seed so that it looked as though I took one from the glass bottle."

The duke looked at her with smoldering hate, the fire of hell in his eyes, but he was helpless. The virus from the seed of death

had already prostrated his nervous system and he was started on the long road that the other brave men had taken.

The tigress clapped her hands, and in walked the butler and the valet. Without a word, they took the duke and carried him to his bed. On that bed he was destined to lie till his body turned to bones, skin and dust. Then the woman clapped her hands again, and, when another servant came, she gave him the letters to the American ambassador, with orders to mail it. Then she went to her bedroom, talking softly to herself.

"I am tired," she said, "and slightly nauseated. I do not seem to stand excitement as well as I did once. Well. That

makes one more fool. I wonder when I can stop. Certainly not so long as I gain such wonderful delight from my darling blossoms."

The sunlight was streaming through her bedroom windows. Slowly she undressed, and, with her six orchids in her hand, she sank luxuriously into the downy softness of her bed. She placed the blossoms on her shoulders, neck and face and, quivering, shut her eyes.

The flowers awakened, and stretching forth their tremulous pistils and stamens, stroked her skin.

With a convulsive effort she gathered them to her lips and kissed them till she slept.

We wish to thank the many readers who have sent us lists of story titles, or nominated favorite authors, for consideration in future issues. Every suggestion is recorded on our master list, along with the name and address of the reader who makes it (so we can send the reader a complimentary copy if we are able to take his suggestion).

We hope to start making use of this wonderful resource, starting with our next issue, and hope eventually, to present all the authors you have asked for, and as many of the specific stories as possible.

The Seeking Thing

by Janet Hirsch

This story came to us bearing a masculine-sounding pseudonym, but inquiry revealed that the author is, as she puts it, "the suburban Mother and Wife. I do some real estate advertising and spend much of my time traveling the Long Island scene choreographing two or three musical shows each year." Let us state for the benefit of all that in this office no female horror author will be overlooked, as our newcomer feared. This might have been a danger thirty or more years ago, but not now, when one cannot make even a cursory list of top horror writers without encountering the deadlier-than-male. No reflection, of course.

THE COUNTRY road wasn't paved and the green Pontiac raised pools of dust as Paul Allenby drove carefully along in the dimming Autumn day. Everything was hazy, and he squinted as he went along, straining to see the many curves and turns in the fading light. Suddenly he jammed on the brakes, and, swearing under his breath, peered out into the dusk. A crumpled shape lay

near his right front wheel. He snapped off the ignition and got out, muttering "Always has to be me" — but he quickly knelt down beside the huddled figure trying to find some sign of life.

As he touched the limp body he jumped to his feet with an involuntary cry of revulsion. Then he laughed harshly, but his hand was shaking as he lit a cigarette and gave the old burlap bag a disgusted kick. With-

out another look he got into the car, slammed the door and drove away.

He didn't feel the soft touch of the bag as it attached itself under the car.

It was dark when the stocky, dark-haired Allenby reached the motel, and he parked the dusty car behind his cabin. When he got inside he switched on the lights, got a glass, and poured himself a generous slug of bourbon.

"Sure can use this." His pleasant face wore a smile, but he was still shaking. As he raised his glass his hand stopped in mid-air and the smile left. There was a wide ugly scratch, stretching from finger tip to wrist, slowly oozing blood. "That's funny" he mused. "I didn't feel a thing. There must have been a nail in that old sack. He gulped his drink gratefully and then fixed up his hand with iodine and bandaid.

The throbbing woke him up just as it was getting light outside. "Oh-oh, I'm in for it. Guess I better get to Doc Bradley for a Tet shot before I go home." He grabbed a quick coffee at the all night stand and got an early start.

He didn't see the curled-up shape lying on the floor in the back of the car.

THE DOCTOR stripped off the bandage. A putrid stench rushed into the room and he

stepped back. "Good God, man, what happened to you?"

Paul Allenby shrugged his broad shoulders. "It's only a scratch Doc — hasn't even bothered me until this morning."

Doctor Bradley went to work quickly cleaning and dressing the bloodless gash. Puzzled, he shook his head. "It's a mess, all right — but strangely enough, there doesn't seem to be any infection. Still, I'm going to give you a penicillin shot along with the tetanus just to make sure. And listen, Paul, call me tomorrow and let me know how you feel."

"Sure, sure, I won't forget." Allenby watched impatiently as the slender, adept fingers bandaged the brown-stained hand, thanked the tall physician, and drove home.

Paul Allenby quietly let himself in the front door of his comfortable brick ranch house and tiptoed toward the kitchen in the back. "I'll be some surprise for Helen," he chuckled to himself as he crept up behind her. She was washing some glasses in the sink and her gay humming, combined with the sound of running water, made his approach completely unheard.

As he kissed the back of her neck, whispering "Surprise!" she whirled around with a sharp scream and hit him across the face. He fell back in shocked disbelief and then saw the horrified dismay in her violet eyes.

She just stood there, repeating "I'm sorry, I'm sorry." He led her over to a chair and tried to calm her down.

"It's all right, baby, never mind. All my fault for startling you anyway."

She smiled wanly, pushing back her disarrayed blonde hair. "You scared me stiff, Paul, I thought you were some strange thing. I'm always nervous when you're away . . . I'm sorry."

He laughed at her, stroking her hair and patting her hands. "There you go again on that Alfred Hitchcock kick of yours." After he kissed away her pout, she noticed his bandaged hand.

"What's that?" she asked. "And whatever happened to your suit? Sleep in a barn?"

"Just a scratch, honey. Tell you all about it later over dinner — and make it snappy will ya, I'm starved?"

As he showered and changed his clothes, he noticed a clinging sour smell and decided it was his crumpled suit added to the medication. He forgot all about it over Helen's delicious pork and pineapple casserole.

NEXT MORNING, Helen left the house quietly. It was Saturday and Paul always slept late on weekends after he came back from one of his trips. So she took the dirty suit to the tailor to be cleaned and pressed and "deodorized, if possible".

Her perky nose wrinkled with distaste. Then she bought some things that Paul liked especially; she got fresh cream, a honeydew, some imported roquefort, and a carton of beer.

He wasn't really asleep, but he wanted to think things out; and, above all, he didn't want to frighten Helen. His hand didn't hurt at all, but the brown stain had spread up to his elbow and the odor rose up in nauseating waves. He got up and showered and the odor subsided, but he wasn't reassured. He called the doctor on the kitchen phone.

"No pain at all, Doc," he said, "but — now don't worry Helen — I'm dizzy as hell, and this thing really stinks."

"I've got an emergency operation out at the hospital, but you stay put. I'll call you the minute I'm through and you get right over here. No point in fooling around with this thing."

"O.K." Allenby said resignedly, but he felt a growing sense of dread as he hung up. Still, he managed his usual cheerful greeting for Helen as she breezed into the house and put the packages on the kitchen table. She bounded down on his lap and threw her arms around his neck.

"Look what I bought you," she giggled as she jumped up, then said in a voice suddenly serious, "How's the hand this morning, Ducky?"

"Everything is fine," he lied "but Doc Bradley wants to see me later. Will you drive me over?"

"Anytime. Gee, I'm glad you're home."

"Me too."

She kept up a running stream of conversation as she put the things in the refrigerator. "You know what? The garage smelled so awful this morning, like something died and forgot to get buried. I took the car to that Karkwick place on Sunrise for a wash and that must have been it. When I got back everything was O.K."

They hadn't heard the shredded gunnysack dragging itself along as it crept into the cellar.

THEY SPENT THE rest of the day puttering around the house and garden and Paul felt less alarmed with Helen chattering gayly at his side. It was a beautiful October, still warm, and, as he rested in the hammock with a cool drink in his hand, he almost forgot. But, when it started getting darker and they went into the house, the heaviness settled on his chest again. He was much dizzy now and the bitter musty smell had returned even stronger. The doctor hadn't called yet and Paul climbed the stairs wearily to his room.

Helen was busy in the kitchen and he hoped she was unaware of his steadily increas-

ing uneasiness. As he stripped to shower for the second time that day, he saw with horror the stain had spread over his shoulder and down across his chest. For a moment he lost all courage and let his head drop, while his sagging body took on a shapeless form, then he took a deep breath and straightened up. The shower took away the odor and cleared his head. "Better hurry up Doc Bradley," he thought and slowly went down for dinner.

It was dark when the call finally came and Helen was putting the dishes away. Vaguely relieved, Paul answered, "Yea, yea, sure, I understand. I'll be right over." He turned to his wife. "Honey, get a light coat, will you? I'll go up and get the keys."

He didn't need to turn on the lamps. The street lights shining in the window showed him the keys lying on the dresser where he knew they'd be. The strong damp odor of mildew was choking as he scooped them up and turned to leave. Then he stopped, stunned at the reflection in the mirror of the darkened room. A baggy shape rose up silently beside him. Its faceless head was split with a mirthless grin and as it stretched out an armless sleeve and touched Paul Allenby's shoulder, it whispered hoarsely, "Blood brother."

He couldn't stop screaming.

A Vision Of Judgment

by H. G. Wells

As with the story dealing with Satan and human relationships with him, the tale which pictures the Last Judgment is one which never grows old, in itself. This story comes from the collection of Wells' short stories entitled "The Time Machine and Other Stories," and the closest date we can find for it is *circa* 1896. Whether the tale first appeared between hard covers in this collection, or saw magazine appearance earlier, we have been unable to discover. In any event, Mr. Wells' version is quite at variance with Dante and the Fundamentalists, and perhaps not quite like anyone else's ideas on the subject — at least prior to his writing.

BRU-A-A-A.

I listened, not understanding.

Wa-ra-ra-ra.

"Good Lord!" said I, still only half awake. "What an infernal shindy!"

Ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra. Ta-ra-ra-ra.

"It's enough," said I, "to wake . . ." and stopped short. Where was I?

Ta-rra-rara — louder and louder.

"It's either some new invention . . ."

Toora-toora-toora! Deafening!

"No," said I, speaking loud in order to hear myself. "That's the Last Trump."

Tooo-rraa!

2

THE LAST NOTE jerked me out of my grave like a hooked minnow.

I saw my monument (rather a mean little affair, and I wished I knew who'd done it), and the old elm tree and the sea view vanished like a puff of steam, and then all about me —

a multitude no man could number, nations, tongues, kingdoms, peoples — children of all ages, in an amphitheatral space as vast as the sky. And over against us, seated on a throne of dazzling white cloud, the Lord God and all the host of His angels. I recognized Azreal by his darkness and Michael by his sword, and the great angel who had blown the trumpet, stood with the trumpet still half raised.

3

"PROMPT," SAID THE little man beside me. "Very prompt. Do you see the angel with the book?"

He was ducking and craning his head about to see over and under and between the souls that crowded around us. "Everybody. And now we shall know . . ."

"There's Darwin," he said, going off at a tangent. "*He'll* catch it! And there — you see? — that tall, important-looking man trying to catch the eye of the Lord God, that's the Duke. But there's a lot of people one doesn't know."

"Oh! There's Priggles, the publisher. I have always wondered about printers' overs. Priggles was a clever man . . . But we shall know now — even about him.

"I shall hear all that. I shall

get most of the fun before . . . My letter's S."

He drew the air between his teeth.

"Historical characters, too. See? That's Henry the Eighth. There'll be a good deal of evidence. Oh, damn! He's Tudor."

He lowered his voice. "Notice this chap, just in front of us, all covered with hair. Paleolithic, you know. And there again . . ."

But I did not heed him, because I was looking at the Lord God.

4

"IS THIS *all*?" asked the Lord God.

The angel at the book — it was one of countless volumes, like the British Museum Reading-room Catalogue, glanced at us and seemed to count us in an instant.

"That's all," he said, and added, "It was, O God, a very little planet."

The eyes of God surveyed us. "Let us begin," said the Lord God.

5

THE ANGEL OPENED the book and read a name. It was a name full of A's, and the echoes of it came back out of the uttermost parts of space. I did not catch it clearly, because the little man beside me said, in a sharp jerk, "*What's*

that?" It sounded like "Ahab" to me; but it could not have been the Ahab of Scripture.

Instantly a small black figure was lifted up to a puffy cloud at the very feet of God. It was a stiff little figure, dressed in rich, outlandish robes and crowned, and it folded its arms and scowled.

"Well?" said God, looking down at him.

We were privileged to hear the reply, and indeed the acoustic properties of the place were marvellous.

"I plead guilty," said the little figure.

"Tell them what you have done," said the Lord God.

"I was a king," said the little figure, "a great king, and I was lustful and proud and cruel. I made wars, I devastated countries, I built palaces, and the mortar was the blood of men. Hear, O God, the witnesses against me, calling to you for vengeance. Hundreds and thousands of witnesses." He waved his hands toward us. "And worse! I took a prophet — one of your prophets . . ."

"One of my prophets," said the Lord God.

"And because he would not bow to me, I tortured him for four days and four nights, and in the end he died. I did more, O God, I blasphemed. I robbed you of your honors . . ."

"Robbed me of my honors," said the Lord God.

"I caused myself to be worshipped in your stead. No evil was there but I practiced it; no cruelty wherewith I did not stain my soul. And at last you smote me, O God!"

God raised his eyebrows slightly.

"And I was slain in battle. And so I stand before you, meet for your nethermost Hell! Out of your greatness daring no lies, daring no pleas, but telling the truth of my iniquities before all mankind."

He ceased. His face I saw distinctly, and it seemed to me white and terrible and proud and strangely noble. I thought of Milton's Satan.

"Most of that is from the Obelisk," said the Recording Angel, finger on page.

"It is," said the Tyrannous Man, with a faint touch of surprise.

Then suddenly God bent forward and took this man in His hand and held him up on His palm as if to see him better.

"Did he do all this?" said the Lord God.

The Recording Angel flattened his book with one hand.

"In a way," said the Recording Angel, carelessly.

Now when I looked at the little man his face had changed in a very curious manner. He was looking at the Recording Angel with a strange apprehen-

sion in his eyes, and one hand fluttering to his mouth. Just the movement of a muscle or so, and all that dignity of defiance was gone.

"Read," said the Lord God.

And the angel read, explaining very carefully and fully the wickedness of the Wicked Man. It was quite an intellectual treat — a little "daring" in places, I thought, but of course Heaven has its privileges. . . .

B

EVERYBODY WAS laughing. Even the prophet of the Lord whom the Wicked Man had tortured had a smile on his face. The Wicked Man was such a preposterous little fellow.

"And then," read the Recording Angel, with a smile that set us all agog, "one day when he was a little irascible from over-eating, he . . ."

"Oh, not *that*," cried the Wicked Man, "nobody knew of *that*."

"It didn't happen," screamed the Wicked Man. "I was bad — I was really bad. Frequently bad, but there was nothing so silly — so absolutely silly . . ."

The angel went on reading.

"O God!" cried the Wicked Man. "Don't let them know that! I'll repent. I'll apologize . . ."

The Wicked Man on God's hand began to dance and weep. Suddenly shame overcame him. He made a wild rush to jump

off the ball of God's little finger, but God stopped him by a dexterous turn of the wrist. Then he made a rush for the gap between hand and thumb, but the thumb closed. And all the while the angel went on reading — reading. The Wicked Man rushed to and fro across God's palm, and then suddenly turned about and fled up the sleeve of God.

I expected that God would turn him out, but the mercy of God is infinite.

The Recording Angel paused.

"Eh?" said the Recording Angel.

"Next," said God, and before the Recording Angel could call upon the name a hairy creature in filthy rags stood upon God's palm.

7

"HAS GOD GOT Hell up His sleeve then?" said the little man beside me.

"Is there a Hell?" I asked.

"If you notice," he said — he peered between the feet of the great angels — "there's no particular indication of the Celestial City."

"Ssh!" said a little woman near us, scowling. "Hear this blessed Saint."

8

"HE WAS THE Lord of Earth, but I was the prophet of

the God of Heaven," cried the Saint, "and all the people marvelled at the sign. For I, O God, knew of the glories of Thy Paradise. No pain, no hardship, gashing with knives, splinters thrust under my nails, strips of flesh flayed off, all for the glory and honor of God."

God smiled.

"And at last I went, I in my rags and sores, smelling of my holy discomforts . . ."

Gabriel laughed abruptly.

"And lay outside his gates, as a sign, as a wonder . . ."

"As a perfect nuisance," said the Recording Angel, and began to read, heedless of the fact that the Saint was still speaking of the gloriously unpleasant things he had done that Paradise might be his.

And behold, in that book the record of the Saint also was a revelation, a marvel.

It seemed not ten seconds before the Saint also was rushing to and fro over the great palm of God. Not ten seconds! And at last he also shrieked beneath

the pitiless and cynical exposition, and fled also, even as the Wicked Man had fled, into the shadow of the sleeve. And it was permitted us to see into the shadow of the sleeve. And the two sat side by side, stark of all delusions, in the shadow of God's charity, like brothers.

And thither also I fled in my turn.

9

"AND NOW," said God as He shook us out of His sleeve upon the planet He had given us to live upon, the planet that whirled about green Sirius for a sun, "now that you understand Me and each other a little better . . . try again."

Then He and His great angels turned themselves about and suddenly had vanished.

The throne had vanished.

All about me was a beautiful land, more beautiful than any I had ever seen before — waste, austere, and wonderful; and all about me were the enlightened souls of men in new clean bodies . . .



The Place Of The Pythons

by Arthur J. Burks

Known in the Thirties as a "million-words-a-year man," one-time Marine Colonel Arthur J. Burks now writes and lectures mostly on psychic subjects. He has written just about every type of fiction imaginable, and is well known to veteran lovers of both science fiction and weird fiction; in the field of the horror story, he has handled all types. Many have been his tales of the West Indies and the Philippines, of which he gained first-hand knowledge during military service; and this knowledge was not superficial but often went deep into the psychic make-up of these peoples.

"AND YOU SHALL go down into the Place of the Pythons for your sins!"

Her long hair, which once had been as black as the wings of a crow, back in the days when she had been one of the most beautiful women of the Tagalogs, now hung in ragged wisps about her face. The face itself was wrinkled and ugly, with two bright old eyes, like

baleful coals of fire, shining upon me. She shook a bony finger in my face as she repeated the words, and her gums worked rapidly, as though she chewed something exceedingly bitter. Perhaps she did, for one had but to examine the depths of her wrinkles to feel that she had known much of bitterness.

I did not know her name. Not that it mattered, but she ran

the little *tindahan* in the only clearing along the coast which was my stamping grounds. As such, there were many things she could do for me, who had neither money nor home — nor self-respect. I admit freely that I often imposed upon her kindness by one shameless subterfuge or another. The world had treated me badly, and owed me a living for all it had made me endure — and I felt, somehow, that the old hag should compensate me for my sufferings.

"And you shall go down into the Place of the Pythons for your sins!"

What the devil did she mean? I didn't care greatly, for I had already downed the drink she had given me. Because I had refused to pay for it, either with money or labor, she had lost her temper, never difficult for her, and these words had been the beginning of a tirade. I only laughed at her — and her sharp old eyes bored into mine. In spite of my bravado, which wasn't always assumed to cover a lack of courage, I could not face those eyes. Looking away, my gaze fell upon a group of natives. They had been jabbering away all the time, but I hadn't noticed them. I took their continual, infernal jabbering as a matter of course, because there was no escape from it anywhere in the Philippines.

IT WAS THEIR sudden, total

cessation of jabbering that caught my attention and held it. That and something more. Most natives — though many pretend otherwise — understand English and speak it atrociously, and all of the noisy group had heard the words of the keeper of the *tindahan*:

"And you shall go down into the Place of the Pythons for your sins!"

There was horror and fear in the eyes of every one of the natives as they looked at me. Their lips were gaping open, wonderingly — as though they knew themselves to be gazing at someone soon to die! Why did that thought come to me, I wonder? But come it did, as naturally as breathing. As I watched, the natives made their excuses, one to another, and slipped silently out of the little store, with glances back at me over their shoulders.

Slowly I turned back to face the woman whose words had so changed the atmosphere of the place. She was looking at me, I say, yet she seemed not to see me! She looked through me, though I was still there, as though I hadn't been, as though the seat in which I sat had been vacant. I laughed in her wrinkled face, and she did not notice; she seemed not to have heard.

What did she mean by the place of the pythons, into which I must go for my sins? She had said it so straightly, so emphat-

ically, that I knew she believed her own words. It was as though what she had said had really happened, and that I had, with the hearing of those words, already gone into the place of the pythons.

Who am I?

A beachcomber, and there is many another like me in these islands. I am just like the rest, neither better nor worse, and there have been native women.

I SAT QUIETLY and leered at the old hag because her tirade had not shamed me into paying for my drinks — nor for other drinks and food which she had given me from time to time. Oh, she always believed my promises — or did she? Who knows? She gave me food and drink often, and I laughed at her for a fool. The tropics do strange things to white men.

Ignore me, would she, the wispy-haired old hag? But I would see, I would force her to observe me.

I stepped directly past her and took a dusty bottle from a shelf, a bottle of rarest wine, untouched these many years because no white men had come with tastes refined enough to appreciate it. No native understood its value, and looked at it askance as something alien, something made to tickle the palates of foreigners who never came. I took the bottle from the shelf, expecting that the old

hag's tirade would begin again. But still she paid me no heed, looked not once toward me, and in spite of my bravado, I found myself *slinking* toward the door, as though I had been the lowest of sneak thieves.

I slipped from the tindahan and looked furtively all about me, but there was no one in the clearing. Straight ahead of me the Bay of Subic stretched away to the base of the towering Selangens, whose five peaks pierced a settling blanket of snow-white clouds. When the five peaks are covered with clouds, says an old Tagalog legend, there will be rain, and folks should flee to safety before the typhoons come. Back of me the apparently impenetrable jungle crawled upward, ever upward, toward other white clouds which covered the crest of Zambales. The sun had gone down in a blaze of glory behind it, a couple of hours ago.

Impenetrable jungle; but I knew that in it here and there, with doors barred against the mystery of the night, natives hid shivering from the darkness. But I was not afraid, I told myself, and all the curses of all the withered hags in Luzon could not frighten me.

I CLUTCHED the bottle tightly under my arm, bowed my head, and made for the edge of the jungle. A mile from the clearing on the beach, deep in

the heart of the jungle, was a deserted negrito village whence the black folk had fled. They had heard whispers that the constabulary was coming, and I had taken possession of the house of the chief. Many times, during months past, had I wended my way from the clearing to the gap in the woods where the trail began, thence along the trail to the darkened, silent village. I knew every crook of the way by heart and could have followed it blindfolded. There was but one trail, and no one could have left it because the jungle, on either hand was impenetrable.

From behind the five-crested Selangens, there came a rolling rumble of thunder. I stopped and looked back. The five peaks were no longer visible and were completely shrouded by clouds of black. I remembered the old Tagalog legend, turned and hurried faster up the trail.

The first pattering drops of rain fell among the leaves about me, and the air grew suddenly cooler. It had been ten minutes, at a guess, since I had left the tindahan of the hag with the wispy hair. It never required more than twenty minutes, even when I staggered with drink, for me to reach the deserted village which I had taken for my own — and now I was cold sober. I strode ahead, and, after a prolonged roar of thunder, I heard the bombardment of advancing

rain as it pelted the surface of Subic Bay. And darkness that was deeper than the night itself fell all about me.

I stopped and looked upward. The tips of the trees on either hand had begun to bend and sway, as though harried this way and that by invisible fingers. I had but a few minutes, for the roar of the deluge grew louder swiftly, and I knew that every tree in the jungle, within a minute or two, would be bending almost double in the gale. Clutching my bottle more tightly, knowing that I could not lose my way, I ran ahead along the trail.

AND THEN I halted and stood stock still! I had come to the end of the trail. Here the village should be; but there was no village! There was no clearing, even, for the jungle came together about me everywhere. The tops of the trees bent and bowed; the raindrops pattered in the leaves like hail in a growing storm. And then I saw it, though I did not remember that the trail curved just here.

"Strange," I muttered. "That last drink must have been stronger than I thought."

The way lay sharp and plain before me, and the going was easier.

I did not, however, realize *why* it was easier, until a quarter hour had passed. Then I discovered that the way was easier because it led along a

sharp decline — and I knew quite well, that from the tindahan to the village, it was uphill all the way! Wildly I looked about me. It was now too late to escape the storm. The rain, as though my strange discovery had been a signal, came down in torrents. The wind went shouting and screaming through the jungle, bending the largest of the trees until bark and bole cried out in protest. I tried to look back to Subic Bay; but in that direction, if I looked aright, there was nothing but darkness and a wall of blinding rain. I gazed off to my right, and there the jungle lay, white-shrouded with the rain. And whether it traveled upward from me, or down, I could not say.

In an instant it came to me that I was lost. I turned to retrace my steps, bowing my head to the storm, and found that the jungle barred my way inexorably. I swung to the left, felt of the jungle wall with my hands; but in that direction there was no way out. There was a way, but that I knew was wrong, because it led downward.

Well, I would follow on, for where there are trails there are people, and a haven of a sort. My clothing clung to my body like the grip of clammy hands — clammy hands that were strangely warm for all their clamminess. I set my feet on the trail I knew was wrong and moved ahead.

I MOVED AHEAD into the heart of all desolation! The trees themselves became, moment by moment, more gaunt and spectral, as though some ghastly blight had robbed them of the most decorative of their leaves. The bark of them was torn in many places, and the spots thus exposed were silvery like leprosy. At intervals the veil of the rain would shift as I walked, and in the rifts I could see gaunt crags of dripping stone, black shadows at their bases — until the veil dropped down again, mantling the countryside in dread and mystery. There were holes in the trail, now, and some of them were deep, so that I stumbled perpetually, fighting my way.

I knew that I was bleeding from many falls upon the hard points, for I could taste my own blood on my lips which I had bitten through. I moved ahead and my foot stepped into space, and I fell again, upon my face. Slowly, a strange fear came upon me as I lay there, and, gaining my feet again, I paused for breathing space. The whole world seemed full of awful silence.

The rain-veil shifted once more, to give me another glimpse of the desolation — of trees that bent in utter silence before the fury of the storm; of snowy bits of fog which drifted in and out among the spectral trees. And, in that moment, one

lone tree, straight and tall, stood out from all the others. It, like the others, had denuded limbs that made one think of many arms. I stared at this tree in wild amazement, watching the waving of its arms. And all the arms — save one! — waved in unison with one another, inspired by the weight of the storm. But that one arm . . .

It did not wave in unison with the others. It waved, yes, but waved alone. When the other limbs bent downward this one flashed upward! When the other limbs bent gradually from the mother tree, forming arches from butt to tip, this one limb formed a wavering *series* of arches, like a massive streamer snapping in the wind, and its tip whipped right and left with savage violence. The tips of the other limbs were smaller, more slender, than any other portion of the limb in question; but the tip of *this* limb was tuberous, mallet-headed.

AND FROM HEELS to head my body grew cold with fear, for memory was flooding back. There are many things of which the Tagalogs know, unknown to white men, for the Tagalogs are old, their memories are old, going back to many rites no alien has ever heard about.

But the rift filled up with rain and drifting fog, and the spectral tree was swept away.

But for just a moment, ere

the rift closed, I saw — or was it fancy, born of the storm and desolation? — two balls of greenish flame, set close together. They moved up and down with the rising and falling of the storm, like eyes of night which strive to peer through — eyes that looked straight at me.

I screamed aloud, and my words were whipped away by the storm. Forgetful of pitfalls in my path, this unknown path, I dashed ahead. I stumbled, fell, staggered erect, and knew that precious time had been lost — time that I sorely needed. For behind me there was someone or something, that pursued. How I knew I cannot tell you; but I knew. There is no explanation for my sudden knowledge, except perhaps in words of Tagalog derivation — words such as might be used by hags with wispy hair, who eke out meager living by keeping silent watch over precious stores in jungle tindahan. I can only say that I knew, and that I hurried on; and that with each new fall upon the trail I realized the thing which followed me was drawing closer.

DOWN AND EVER down dropped the way before me; rougher and rougher grew the trail. There were holes in it at every step, as though it had been traversed by a ponderous giant who had sunk into the ground with every forward

movement. I could tell by the lessening of the force of the storm that I was dropping swiftly into some valley, though the trees still kept up their ceaseless bowing and bending, and the pounding of the rain on the ground, the rocks, and the trees, was like the drumming of eternal rifle fire.

I stumbled and fell as the way grew more difficult and ever as I felt it became increasingly heart-breaking to rise again. I was numb from injury, bleeding with wounds my falls had given me, and I had taken from the keeper of the tindahan. Icy cold possessed me, cold that was the coldness of fear. For I knew that whatever was behind me had gained appreciably upon me each and every time I fell. And so, I fell again.

This time, however, I fell much farther, and the breath of my body went from me in a rush. I strove to gain my feet, but could not; and so I went forward, draggingly, upon hands and knees. There were now more frequent rifts in the clouds, more frequent glimpses of the desolation all around.

Fearful as I was of the unseen thing which followed, I paused to peer through one of these rifts, at one of the spectral trees — and the tree which caught my gaze was the strangest of any I yet had seen. *All* the limbs were like the *one* limb of that other tree! Its limbs

were not like arms, but streamers, whipping and snapping this way and that; and from the tip of each there glowed two balls of greenish flame, set close together, reminding me of the deep sunken eyes of the keeper of the tindahan.

MOTHER OF HEAVEN! As I watched that tree and the streamers which waved and snapped, there was one which the wind broke loose. I saw it drop soggily to the ground, and as it touched I noted an odd and terrifying circumstance. It did not fall asprawl, as would a lifeless streamer, but in a heap that was conical and rounded, like circles, each one slightly less in diameter than the one below, so that each succeeding circle rested just atop the one below! And out of the center of the coils there lifted, weaving to and fro, a mallet-headed *thing* in which there glowed two lambent dots of greenish flame! And then the rain came down again, and there was drifting fog — fog which came in out of the darkness — and blotted out the sight.

Moaning in my throat, which was tight with terror unbelievable, I struggled on, nor was I conscious for many minutes that I left the place on hands and knees. But then I could not rise, and, after a long time, because the rocks cut into knees and palms, I found it easier, and

rather natural, to *creep* along the trail, upon my stomach. The thickness of my clothing saved my tender flesh from laceration.

It is strange that I did not remember the words of the keeper of the tindahan; but she had said vile things to me before, which I had forgotten at once because they hadn't really mattered.

Then there was no dropping in the trail, which leveled out before me. The surrounding jungle dropped back, away from me on all sides, giving way to a clearing whose limits I could only guess at. The way was smooth and soggy, damp and desolate, with rain all through it, and clouds that were clammy as the touch of cadaverous hands. I raised myself slightly on my hands, straightened my arms, and strove to peer through the desolation, seeking a light which would be a sign of shelter. I did not stand erect, even here. My legs were numb, as were my hips and torso, and I could not bear even the thought of the pain standing erect would cause me. My poor hands! Numb and bleeding I knew them to be. I lowered my head, when I could not discover a light, to look at my hands. But I could not see them — it was so dark. It was as though, almost, I *had* no arms or hands; as though I raised my torso, bowing my back, with neither hands nor arms to brace me.

THERE WAS WATER, slimy water, which moved sluggishly as I moved, throughout the clearing. I peered across its surface, back the way I had come. For the feeling that someone, or something, followed me still possessed me, though some of my fear was gone, lost in numbed resignation. I saw a bit of blackness, like a bit of driftwood, just this side of the spot where I had entered the clearing. And, beyond the bit of driftwood, spreading out like a fan, the slimy water was in commotion. It made me think, that agitation of the slimy water, of triangular fins I had seen on the bosom of Subic Bay — and the spreading wake which stretched rearward behind them! That bit of driftwood, then, was in motion — and it was moving toward me! I turned my head, with a movement which surprised me, a movement that was slow and sinuous, and I crawled along across the clearing.

Off to my right I saw another bit of driftwood; but this one stood higher above the slime, and, like the first, it moved, and there was a spreading wake behind it. When I saw it, it paused in its motion, as though it had been a thing of life and had seen me, and had been startled. And then the bit of driftwood did a strange and awful thing. It reared up higher from the slime, curved over pliantly, and

disappeared beneath the water.

I paused, raised up my head again, as high as I could force my torso with my hands, and looked to every side across the face of the desolate slimy water. I discovered that there were countless bits of driftwood, that every one was in motion, aimless, undirected motion and that there was a spreading wake behind each one. . . .

Then it was that I remembered the words of the keeper of the tindahan!

"And you shall go down into the Place of the Pythons for your sins!"

BUT, STRANGELY enough, I was not frightened. Something told me, in words, or in impressions, which I understood, but could not translate into any language, that I had nothing to fear. I looked back at the mallet-head which had followed me. I knew it all now, since I had peered at the waving arms of the first spectral tree, and had seen the *one* arm which had not swayed and bent and crackled with the strain like all the others. That bit of driftwood now was right behind me, higher from the water, uprearing as it approached, until I could see two bits of flame, greenish and oddly beautiful, which peered at me. There was a forked tongue which leaped at me, drew back and leaped again, with wildly graceful movement.

The python, I knew him now, was not my enemy. He did not fear me, nor had he any designs against me; he knew he had naught to fear from me. He swept up to me, brushing all his sluggish length against that portion of me underneath the water left by the rain. In the touch of him there was an odd caress, as though we two were friends! There was an indescribable friendship in the python's touch, and I had a wild desire to thrust out my hand and press my fingertips against that mallet-head. But my hands refused. They were numb and refused to obey my will. So I contented myself by holding my body against the python's, until he had passed me, and, like that other one, had disappeared from sight.

Here and there in the slime I crawled. Odd how all my life I had never understood the creatures of the wild. Pythons, to me had always been creatures of nightmare, of unutterable horror. Yet here, with pythons all about me, they did not seem so dreadful. The storm, and the desolation, in which there was not another human being, had imbued me with a feeling of kinship for them. In spite of the vast world of evolution which stretched between them and me, I liked their companionship, and did not wish to leave them.

HOURS PASSED, and with

each passing minute one of the pythons would uprear his head and disappear into the slime, to appear no more. And I stayed on in the desolate clearing until the last of them had disappeared. When all had gone a feeling of infinite loneliness settled upon me. All my being cried out for sight or proximity of something else, or someone, who lived. But the pythons had gone, and the surface of the slimy water, save where I myself disturbed it, was glassy smooth. The rain had ceased, and the clouds had drawn back, so that I saw the edges of the clearing, on all sides, and the spectral trees with arms that now were motionless.

With a sigh, which I couldn't really hear, I turned, describing a large circle in the slime, and started back the way I had come. I knew, now that the typhoon had passed, that I could retrace my steps to the first turning, and gain the deserted negrito encampment which I had occupied for so long. It was a long, long way back to that turning; but I had now, it seemed, no capacity for fatigue, though I made the journey on my stomach. I found the way, which should have been plain at first, and after some progress on the well-remembered trail, I saw before me the deserted village of the little blacks.

Only now it was not deserted! There was a flickering light in the chief's house, the very

house I had occupied for so long. No matter, the negritos were my friends, and there would be shelter for me. I crawled along to the hut, from whose roof the water still dripped dismally, and raised my torso again with my hands, to peer into the hut.

There sat the chief, just as all negritos sit, on his heels peering out in the darkness whence I was coming. I would call to him as I entered, so that he would not be frightened. I raised my voice to call.

But I had no words of any language and the sound which came forth from the depth of me was a sullen, angry hiss!

WITH A SCREAM of mortal terror the negrito chief sprang erect as he saw me. His hands went forth automatically, and swiftly grasped a bow and arrow. He drew the arrow to the tip and loosed it. I dodged, and the barbed tip missed my face. It plunged, instead, into my neck, and a murderous hatred for this man whom I had believed my friend flared up within my brain. I inched my way forward, across his threshold, trying to threaten him with words. And my hatred flamed more terribly, when, instead of intelligent speech, came only wordless hissing!

The negrito dropped his bow and a second arrow, for I was now too close, and drew a knife from its sheath at his waist.

Crouching low he waited for me, and I lurched upon him, undaunted by his knife — and literally wrapped myself about him!

Hissing in his face because I could not shout, I tightened my body about him. Before me I saw his eyes stand forth from their sockets, saw him increase in stature oddly, saw the blood suffuse his neck until all the neck was blue, the veins standing out like colored cords. His tongue protruded grotesquely and finally blood gushed from his nostrils, and I heard a crackling sound as I felt his body give throughout its length. And I knew that murderous anger had filled me with such strength that I had broken many bones in the wiry body of the negrito. I slipped back from him when I knew he was dead and —

But I cannot put into words the unbelievable craving which came to me when I looked down upon the man, all crushed and unrecognizable as a man. Almost against my will I moved toward him again — and then drew back; moved ahead, drew back. . . . But the craving, the awful hunger which was mine — how can I put the unbelievable into words?

Whatever of the human there yet remained to me must have saved me. For I drew back from the man I had slain, reluctantly, it is true; turned away at last, and fled into the night.

Where does dream end and reality begin? Would to God I knew!

I remember entering the tindahan once more; I remember that it was deserted and silent, as though everyone had fled in terror. And through the little store I sought for the wispy-haired crone. I did not find her, but I found her room, and, relic of a past that may have had its bit of grandeur — a mirror, cracked and broken. But in its chipped and aged surface I caught a glimpse of myself. I swooned then, and fell; fell downward to where I could no longer see the horror in the looking-glass. And as I fell there slipped down the chipped length of the glass, a hideous mallet-head. My own reflection? Before God, I do not know!

I CAME BACK to consciousness at the table where I had sat when the keeper of the tindahan had started the tirade I was to remember all my days. The place was crowded with natives, and they were talking madly, all at once, of a great python which had been seen the night before. The monstrous creature, they said, was twenty feet long, and he had entered the negrito village, to which the natives had returned the day just previous, and had killed the chief terribly. From there he had come to the tindahan, and everyone had fled, save only a

white man too drunk to move. In all the country about I was the only white man! I looked at the shelf behind the counter. There, dust-covered, still stood the bottle of rare wine, as though it had never been touched!

My mind groped for the answer, for I knew I had not been drunk.

Besides, the wispy-haired keeper of the tindahan was leering at me, and her baleful old eyes were alight with dreadful knowledge. I saw where they were peering . . .

I made haste to pull the collar of my faded coat high up about my neck, to hide a tell-

tale mark I knew was there — a mark which *might* have been made by an arrow that had grazed the flesh.

And, besides, from head to foot, I was covered with evil-smelling slime, the odor of which could not be mistaken. My hands were torn and bleeding, my feet were bare and bloodstained. . . .

It was strange, the natives chattered, that the white man had sat all through it at the table, and the marauding python had not taken him. Through all the excitement, they said, he had not moved.

But I? I knew better. And so did the keeper of the tindahan.

It is too early, as yet, to offer any report on how your letters, postcards, and voting coupons rated the contents of our November issue, but we shall let you know next time. A listing will help us to determine your likes and dislikes; a letter which tells why—particularly in relation to dislikes—will help more. But please do not feel that we are pressuring you; those listings are greeted with joy, no matter what they show.

If you write us at length, but do not want your opinions (or excerpts of them) published, tell us so and we will respect your wishes. If you wish to remain anonymous, but do not mind being quoted thus, or do not wish your address published, we will also follow your desires. But letters should be signed, nonetheless.

Jean Bouchon

by S. Baring-Gould

This tale comes from "A Book Of Ghosts," by S. Baring-Gould, M.A., first published in 1904. Some of the contents had previously appeared in such periodicals as *The Windsor Magazine*, *The Illustrated English Magazine*, and *Once a Week*, as early as 1853. "Jean Bouchon," however, apparently had its first appearance in the collection, and is particularly delightful for the way in which it captures French wit and wisdom. (Our thanks to Richard Witter, for steering us to this volume, and to the Wilkins-Freeman collection.)

I WAS IN Orleans a good many years ago. At the time it was my purpose to write a life of Joan of Arc, and I considered it advisable to visit the scenes of her exploits, so as to be able to give to my narrative some local color.

But I did not find Orleans answer to my expectations. It is a dull town, very modern in appearance, but with that measly and decrepit look which is so general in French towns. There was a Place Jeanne d'Arc, with an equestrian statue of her in the midst, flourishing a banner.

There was the house that the Maid had occupied after the taking of the city, but, with the exception of the walls and rafters, it had undergone so much alteration and modernization as to have lost its interest. A museum of memorials of la Pucelle had been formed, but possessed no genuine relics, only arms and tapestries of a later date.

The city walls she had besieged, the gate through which she had burst, had been levelled, and their places taken by boulevards. The very cathe-

dral in which she had knelt to return thanks for her victory was not the same. That had been blown up by the Huguenots, and the cathedral that now stands was erected on its ruins in 1601.

There was an ornolou figure of Jeanne on the clock — never wound up — upon the mantel-shelf in my room at the hotel, and there were chocolate figures of her in the confectioners' shop-windows for children to suck. When I sat down at 7 P.M. to table d'hôte, at my inn, I was out of heart. The result of my exploration of sites had been unsatisfactory; but I trusted on the morrow to be able to find material to serve my purpose in the municipal archives of the town library.

My dinner ended, I sauntered to a café.

That I selected opened on to the Place, but there was a back entrance near to my hotel, leading through a long, stone-paved passage at the back of the houses in the street, and by ascending three or four stone steps one entered the long, well-lighted café. I came into it from the back by this means, and not from the front.

I took my place and called for a café-cognac. Then I picked up a French paper and proceeded to read it — all but the feuilleton. In my experience I have never yet come across anyone who reads the feuilletons in

a French paper; and my impression is that these snippets of novel are printed solely for the purpose of filling up space and disguising the lack of news at the disposal of the editors. The French papers borrow their information relative to foreign affairs largely from the English journals, so that they are a day behind ours in the foreign news that they publish.

Whilst I was engaged in reading, something caused me to look up, and I noticed standing by the white marble-topped table, on which was my coffee, a waiter, with a pale face and black whiskers, in an expectant attitude.

I was a little nettled at his precipitancy in applying for payment, but I put it down to my being a total stranger there; and without a word I set down half a franc and a ten centimes coin, the latter as his *pourboire*. Then I proceeded with my reading.

I think a quarter of an hour had elapsed, when I rose to depart, and then, to my surprise, I noticed the half-franc still on the table, but the sous piece was gone.

I beckoned to a waiter, and said: "One of you came to me a little while ago demanding payment. I think he was somewhat hasty in pressing for it; however, I set the money down, and the fellow has taken the

tip, and has neglected the charge for the coffee."

"*Sapristi!*" exclaimed the garcon; "Jean Bouchon has been at his tricks again."

I said nothing further; asked no questions. The matter did not concern me, or indeed interest me in the smallest degree; and I left.

NEXT DAY, I worked hard in the town library. I cannot say that I lighted on any unpublished documents that might serve my purpose.

I had to go through the controversial literature relative to whether Jeanne d'Arc was burnt or not, for it has been maintained that a person of the same name, and also of Arques, died a natural death some time later, and who postured as the original warrior-maid. I read a good many monographs on the Pucelle, of various values; some real contributions to history, others mere second-hand cookings-up of well-known and often-used material. The sauce in these latter was all that was new.

In the evening, after dinner, I went back to the same cafe and called for black coffee with a nip of brandy. I drank it leisurely, and then retreated to the desk where I could write some letters.

I had finished one, and was folding it, when I saw the same pole-visaged waiter standing by

with his hand extended for payment. I put my hand into my pocket, pulled out a fifty centimes piece and a coin of two sous, and placed both beside me, near the man, and proceeded to put my letter in an envelope, which I then directed.

Next I wrote a second letter, and that concluded, I rose to go to one of the tables and to call for stamps, when I noticed that again the silver coin had been left untouched, but the copper piece had been taken away.

I tapped for a waiter.

"*Tiens,*" said I, "that fellow of yours has been bungling again. He has taken the tip and has left the half-franc."

"Ah! Jean Bouchon once more!"

"But who is Jean Bouchon?"

The man shrugged his shoulders, and, instead of answering my query, said: "I should recommend monsieur to refuse to pay Jean Bouchon again — that is, supposing monsieur intends revisiting this cafe."

"I most assuredly will not pay such a noodle," I said; "and it passes my comprehension how you keep such a fellow on your staff."

I revisited the library next day, and then walked by the Loire, that rolls in winter such a full and turbid stream, and in summer, with a reduced flood, exposes gravel and sand-banks. I wandered around the town,

and endeavored vainly to picture it, enclosed by walls and drums of towers, when on April 29th, 1429, Jeanne threw herself into the town and forced the English to retire, discomfited and perplexed.

IN THE EVENING I revisited the cafe and made my wants known as before. Then I looked at my notes, and began to arrange them.

Whilst thus engaged I observed the waiter, named Jean Bouchon, standing near the table in an expectant attitude as before. I now looked him full in the face and observed his countenance. He had puffy white cheeks, small black eyes, thick dark mutton-chop whiskers, and a broken nose. He was decidedly an ugly man, but not a man with a repulsive expression of face.

"No," said I, "I will give you nothing. I will not pay you. Send another *garcon* to me."

As I looked at him to see how he took this refusal, he seemed to fall back out of my range, or, to be more exact, the lines of his form and features became confused. It was much as though I had been gazing on a reflection in still water; that something had ruffled the surface, and all was broken up and obliterated. I could see him no more. I was puzzled and a bit startled, and I rapped my coffee-cup with the spoon to call the attention

of a waiter. One sprang to me immediately.

"See!" said I, "Jean Bouchon has been here again; I told him that I would not pay him one sou, and he has vanished in a most perplexing manner. I do not see him in the room."

"No, he is not in the room."

"When he comes in again, send him to me. I want to have a word with him."

The waiter looked confused, and replied: "I do not think that Jean will return."

"How long has he been on your staff?"

"Oh! he has not been on our staff for some years."

"Then why does he come here and ask for payment for coffee and what else one may order?"

"He never takes payment for anything that has been consumed. He takes only the tips."

"But why do you permit him to do that?"

"We cannot help ourselves."

"He should not be allowed to enter the cafe."

"No one can keep him out."

"This is surpassing strange. He has no right to the tips. You should communicate with the police."

The waiter shook his head. "They can do nothing. Jean Bouchon died in 1869."

"Died in 1869!" I repeated.

"It is so. But he still comes here. He never pesters the old customers, the inhabitants of

the town — only visitors, strangers."

"Tell me all about him."

"Monsieur must pardon me now. We have many in the place, and I have my duties."

"In that case I will drop in here tomorrow morning when you are disengaged, and I will ask you to inform me about him. What is your name?"

"At monsieur's pleasure — Alphonse."

NEXT MORNING, in place of pursuing the traces of the Maid of Orleans, I went to the cafe to hunt up Jean Bouchon. I found Alphonse with a duster wiping down the tables. I invited him to a table and made him sit down opposite me. I will give his story in substance, only where advisable recording his exact words.

Jean Bouchon had been a waiter at this particular cafe. Now in some of these establishments the attendants are wont to have a box, into which they drop all the tips that are received; and at the end of the week it is opened, and the sum found in it is divided *pro rata* among the waiters, the head waiter receiving a larger portion than the others. This is not customary in all such places of refreshment, but it is in some, and it was so in this cafe. The average is pretty constant, except on special occasions, as when a fete occurs; and the

waiters know within a few francs what their perquisites will be.

But in the cafe where served Jean Bouchon the sum did not reach the weekly total that might have been anticipated; and after this deficit had been noted for a couple of months the waiters were convinced that there was something wrong, somewhere or somehow. Either the common box was tampered with, or one of them did not put in his tips received. A watch was set, and it was discovered that Jean Bouchon was the defaulter. When he had received a gratuity, he went to the box, and pretended to put in the coin, but no sound followed, as would have been the case had one been dropped in.

There ensued, of course, a great commotion among the waiters when this was discovered. Jean Bouchon endeavored to brave it out, but the *patron* was appealed to, the case stated, and he was dismissed. As he left by the back entrance, one of the younger *garçons* put out his leg and tripped Bouchon up, so that he stumbled and fell headlong down the steps with a crash on the stone floor of the passage. He fell with such violence on his forehead that he was taken insensible. His bones were fractured, there was concussion of the brain, and he died within a few hours without recovering consciousness.

"We were all very sorry and greatly shocked," said Alphonse; "we did not like the man, he had dealt dishonorably by us, but we wished him no ill, and our resentment was at an end when he was dead. The waiter who had tripped him up was arrested, and was sent to prison for some months, but the accident was due to *une mauvaise plaisanterie* and no malice was in it, so that the young fellow got off with a light sentence. He afterwards married a widow with a cafe at Vierzou, and is there, I believe, doing well.

"Jean Bouchon was buried," continued Alphonse; "and we waiters attended the funeral and held white kerchiefs to our eyes. Our head waiter even put a lemon into his, that by squeezing it he might draw tears from his eyes. We all subscribed for the interment, that it should be dignified — majestic as becomes a waiter."

"And do you mean to tell me that Jean Bouchon has haunted this cafe ever since?"

"Ever since 1869," replied Alphonse.

"And there is no way of getting rid of him?"

"None at all, monsieur. One of the Canons of Bourges came in here one evening. We did suppose that Jean Bouchon would not approach, molest an ecclesiastic, but he did. He took his *pourboire* and left the rest,

just as he treated monsieur. Ah! monsieur! but Jean Bouchon did well in 1870 and 1871 when those pigs of Prussians were here in occupation. The officers came nightly to our cafe, and Jean Bouchon was greatly on the alert. He must have carried away half of the gratuities they offered. It was a sad loss to us."

"This is a very extraordinary story," said I.

"But it is true," replied Alphonse.

Next day I left Orleans. I gave up the notion of writing the life of Joan of Arc, as I found that there was absolutely no new material to be gleaned on her history — in fact, she had been thrashed out.

YEARS PASSED, and I had almost forgotten about Jean Bouchon, when, the other day, I was in Orleans once more, on my way south, and at once the whole story recurred to me.

I went that evening to the same cafe. It had been smartened up since I was there before. There was more plate glass, more gilding; electric light had been introduced, there were more mirrors, and there were also ornaments that had not been in the cafe before.

I called for cafe-cognac and looked at a journal, but turned my eyes on one side occasionally, on the lookout for Jean Bouchon. But he did not put in an appearance. I waited for a

quarter of an hour in expectation, but saw no sign of him.

Presently I summoned a waiter, and when he came up I inquired: "But where is Jean Bouchon?"

"Monsieur asks after Jean Bouchon?" The man looked surprised.

"Yes, I have seen him here previously. Where is he at present?"

"Monsieur has seen Jean Bouchon? Monsieur perhaps knew him. He died in 1869."

"I know that he died in 1869, but I made his acquaintance in 1874. I saw him then thrice, and he accepted some small gratuities of me."

"Monsieur tipped Jean Bouchon?"

"Yes, and Jean Bouchon accepted my tips."

"*Tiens*, and Jean Bouchon died five years before."

"Yes, and what I want to know is how you have rid yourselves of Jean Bouchon, for that you have cleared the place of him is evident, or he would have been pestering me this evening." The man looked disconcerted and irresolute.

"Hold," said I; "is Alphonse here?"

"No, monsieur, Alphonse has left two or three years ago. And monsieur saw Jean Bouchon in 1874. I was not then here. I have been here only six years."

"But you can in all probabili-

ty inform me of the manner of getting quit of Jean."

"Monsieur! I am very busy this evening, there are so many gentlemen come in."

"I will give you five francs if you will tell me all — all — succinctly about Jean Bouchon."

"Will monsieur be so good as to come here tomorrow during the morning? and then I place myself at the disposition of monsieur."

"I shall be here at eleven o'clock."

AT THE APPOINTED time I was at the cafe. If there is an institution that looks ragged and dejected and dissipated, it is a cafe in the morning, when the chairs are turned upside-down, the waiters are in aprons and shirt-sleeves, and a smell of stale tobacco lurks about the air, mixed with various other unpleasant odors.

The waiter I had spoken to on the previous evening was looking out for me. I made him seat himself at a table with me. No one else was in the saloon except another *garçon*, who was dusting with a long feather-brush.

"Monsieur," began the waiter, "I will tell you the whole truth. The story is curious, and perhaps everyone would not believe it, but it is well *documentee*. Jean Bouchon was at one time in service here. We had a box. When I say we, I do not mean

myself included, for I was not here at the time."

"I know about the common box. I know the story down to my visit to Orleans in 1874, when I saw the man."

"Monsieur has perhaps been informed that he was buried in the cemetery?"

"I do know that, at the cost of his fellow-waiters."

"Well, monsieur, he was poor, and his fellow-waiters, though well-disposed, were not rich. So he did not have a grave *en perpetuite*. Accordingly, after many years, when the term of consignment was expired, and it might well be supposed that Jean Bouchon had mouldered away, his grave was cleared out to make room for a fresh occupant. Then a very remarkable discovery was made. It was found that his corroded coffin was crammed — literally stuffed — with five and ten centimes pieces, and with them were also some Germain coins, no doubt received from those pigs of Prussians during the occupation of Orleans. This discovery was much talked about. Our proprietor of the cafe and the head waiter went to the mayor and represented to him how matters stood — that all this money had been filched during a series of years since 1869 from the waiters. And our *patron* represented to him that it should in all propriety and justice be restored to us. The mayor was

a man of intelligence and heart, and he quite accepted this view of the matter, and ordered the surrender of the whole coffin-load of coins to us, the waiters of the cafe."

"So you divided it amongst you."

"Pardon, monsieur; we did not. It is true that the money might legitimately be regarded as belonging to us. But then those defrauded, or most of them, had left long ago, and there were among us some who had not been in service in the cafe more than a year or eighteen months. We could not trace the old waiters. Some were dead, some had married and left this part of the country. We were not a corporation. So we held a meeting to discuss what was to be done with the money. We feared, moreover, that unless the spirit of Jean Bouchon were satisfied, he might continue revisiting the cafe and go on sweeping away the tips. It was of paramount importance to please Jean Bouchon, to lay out the money in such a manner as would commend itself to his feelings. One suggested one thing, one another. One proposed that the sum should be expended on masses for the repose of Jean's soul. But the head waiter objected to that. He said that he thought he knew the mind of Jean Bouchon, and that this would not commend itself

to it. He said, did our head waiter, that he knew Jean Bouchon from head to heels. And he proposed that all the coins should be melted up, and that out of them should be cast a statue of Jean Bouchon in bronze, to be set up here in the cafe, as there were not enough coins to make one large enough to be erected in a Place. If monsieur will step with me he will see the statue; it is a superb work of art."

He led the way, and I followed.

IN THE MIDST of the cafe stood a pedestal, and on this basis a bronze figure about four feet high. It represented a man reeling backward, with a banner in his left hand, and the right raised towards his brow, as though he had been struck there by a bullet. A sabre, apparently fallen from his grasp, lay at his feet. I studied the face, and it most assuredly was utterly unlike Jean Bouchon with his puffy cheeks, mutton-chop whiskers, and broken nose, as I recalled him.

"But," said I, "the features do not — pardon me — at all resemble those of Jean Bouchon. This might be the young Augustus, or Napoleon I. The profile is quite Greek."

"It may be so," replied the waiter. "But we had no photographs to go by. We had to allow the artist to exercise his genius, and, above all, we had

to gratify the spirit of Jean Bouchon."

"I see. But the attitude is inexact. Jean Bouchon fell down the steps headlong, and this represents a man staggering backwards."

"It would have been inartistic to have shown him precipitated forwards; besides, the spirit of Jean might not have liked it."

"Quite so. I understand. But the flag?"

"That was an idea of the artist. Jean could not be made holding a coffee-cup. You will see the whole makes a superb subject. Art has its exigencies. Monsieur will see underneath is an inscription on the pedestal."

I stooped, and with some astonishment read:

JEAN BOUCHON
MORT SUR LE CHAMP DE GLOIRE
1870
DULCE ET DECORUM EST PRO PATRIA
MORI

"WHY!" OBJECTED I, "he died from falling a cropper in the back passage, not on the field of glory."

"Monsieur! all Orleans is a field of glory. Under S. Aignan did we not repel Attila and his Huns in 451? Under Jeanne d'Arc did we not repulse the English — monsieur will excuse — the allusion — in 1429. Did we not recapture Orleans from the Germans in November, 1870?"

"That is all very true," I broke

in. "But Jean Bouchon neither fought against Attila nor with la Pucelle, nor against the Prussians. Then '*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*' is rather strong, considering the facts."

"How? Does not monsieur see that the sentiment is patriotic and magnificent?"

"I admit that, but dispute the application."

"Then why not apply it? The sentiment is all right."

"But by implication it refers to Jean Bouchon, who died, not for his country, but in a sordid coffee-house brawl. Then, again, the date is wrong. Jean Bouchon died in 1869, not in 1870."

"That is only out by a year."

"Yes, but with this mistake of a year, and with the quotation from Horace, and with the attitude given to the figure, anyone would suppose that Jean Bouchon had fallen in the re-taking of Orleans from the Prussians."

"Ah! monsieur, who looks on a monument and expects to find the literal truth relative to the deceased?"

"This is something of a sacrifice to truth," I demurred.

"Sacrifice is superb!" said the waiter. "There is nothing more noble, more heroic than sacrifice."

"But not the sacrifice of truth."

"Sacrifice is always sacrifice."

"Well," said I, unwilling further to dispute, "this is cer-

tainly a great creation out of nothing."

"Not out of nothing; out of the coppers that Jean Bouchon had filched from us, and which choked up his coffin."

"Jean Bouchon has been seen no more?"

"No, monsieur. And yet — yes, once, when the statue was unveiled. Our *patron* did that. The cafe was crowded. All our *habitués* were there. The *patron* made a magnificent oration; he drew a superb picture of the moral, intellectual, social, and political merits of Jean Bouchon. There was not a dry eye among the audience, and the speaker choked with emotion. Then, as we stood in a ring, not too near, we saw — I was there and I distinctly saw, so did the others — Jean Bouchon standing with his back to us, looking intently at the statue of himself. Monsieur, as he thus stood I could discern his black mutton-chop whiskers projecting upon each side of his head. Well, sir, not one word was spoken. A dead silence fell upon all. Our *patron* ceased to speak, and wiped his eyes and blew his nose. A sort of holy awe possessed us all. Then, after the lapse of some minutes, Jean Bouchon turned himself about, and we all saw his puffy pale cheeks, his thick sensual lips, his broken nose, his little pig's eyes. He was very unlike his

idealized portrait in the statue; but what matters that? It gratified the deceased, and it injured no one. Well, monsieur, Jean Bouchon stood facing us, and he turned his head from one

side to another, and gave us all what I may term a greasy smile. Then he lifted up his hands as though invoking a blessing on us all, and vanished. Since then he has not been seen."



THE DUNWICH HORROR AND OTHERS

Several readers, in addition to Mr. August Derleth, have written to correct us on the statement in our August issue that Arkham House may be reprinting the original collection of the works of H. P. Lovecraft, **The Outsider And Others**. The book that has been issued is entitled **The Dunwich Horror And Others** by H. P. Lovecraft.

This volume contains a lengthy introduction, "H. P. Lovecraft and His Work", by August Derleth, and the following stories: "The Dunwich Horror", "In The Vault", "Pickman's Model", "The Rats In The Walls", "The Outsider", "The Colour Out Of Space", "The Music Of Erich Zann", "The Haunter Of The Dark", "The Picture In The House", "The Call of Cthulhu", "Cool Air", "The Whisperer In Darkness", "The Terrible Old Man", "The Thing On The Doorstep", "The Shadow Over Innsmouth", and "The Shadow Out Of Time".

The cover jacket is by Lee Brown Coye, and the price of the volume is \$5.00. Opinion will vary as to whether this selection is really "the best of Lovecraft", but there can be no doubt that some of the best are here—enough to justify the price.

The Door

by Rachel Cosgrove Payes

Mrs. Payes was one of the successors to L. Frank Baum, when the publishers of the famous "Oz" books decided to keep the series going after its originator could no longer continue, due to difficulties best described as immaterial. She has written numerous mystery and romance novels for Avalon Books, and has recently branched into science fiction mystery for the same publisher. We sent her a copy of our first issue, and received the present story shortly thereafter with a letter starting out: "Editors who send Horror magazines to sweet, innocent writers like me must suffer the consequences (enclosed)." After we had read the "enclosed," we saw no reason why we should suffer such consequences alone — and trust that you will heed the warning implied in this simple tale.

"NOW WHAT ARE they building?" John asked me as we passed the two carpenters busy with saws and rulers.

"I don't know. There certainly isn't much room here for a building."

"Maybe it's to be one of those sheds for the construction workers," John guessed, and we let it go at that.

Next day we passed the spot on our way to lunch. The two carpenters were still hard at

work; they had erected a wooden framework and were bracing it in place.

"Can't be a building," John said. "There seems to be only one side to whatever it is."

"Could it be a sign?" I asked.

"It's a screwy place for a sign. Who'd see it? Just a few of us guys on our way to lunch."

I had to agree; but I was getting curious about the thing by now. I would have asked the carpenters, but they seemed so

busy with their work that I hated to bother them. Besides, it was none of my business. I couldn't help wondering about it, though.

That was on Wednesday. Thursday noon, John came over and asked if I could go to lunch a little late. It didn't matter to me, so I said I could. On our way to the cafeteria, we got talking about this big building project.

"What could it be, a thing like that with no sides to it? Only one surface?" John asked.

I shrugged my shoulders. It had me.

By this time we were close enough to see the thing.

"Well, I'll be . . ." John said. "Would you look at that!"

I was looking. Do you know what the thing looked like? It looked like a door. That's right, a door.

"Am I cracking up, or is that really what it looks like?"

John had the most quizzical expression on his big, homely face. "It's a door," he said, and it was comical to hear him. Such a pained tone of voice. "What in the world are they doing, putting up a door out here in the middle of nothing at all? Do you think the guys are nuts?"

"Brother, you've got me. Shall I ask them what the score is?"

"Better not," John cautioned in a low voice. "Some of those guys from the carpenter shop are pretty stand-offish. They

don't like anyone sticking his nose in their business."

We moved on; but John kept looking back over his shoulder and muttering, "A door. A stupid, stinking door standing up there in the middle of nothing. Beats me."

WHEN WE GOT back to the shop, John cornered the foreman and asked, "Hey, Fred, have you seen what they're building up by the cafeteria?"

Fred shook his head. "I bring my lunch — don't get up that way often."

"You'll never believe this," John told him, "but a couple of crazy carpenters are putting up a door."

"A door?" Fred looked at John as if he hadn't heard him right.

"A door. Just an ordinary door, in an ordinary door frame, over an ordinary door sill — propped up there beside the walk. Period."

"You nuts, John? Nobody'd build just a door."

John beckoned to me to come over. "He doesn't believe me. You tell him."

"John's right," I said. "It beats me, Fred. Here are these two carpenters working like mad on a door — and there's no building around, nor there's no sign of any building to go up there. It's just a fancy door propped up there, as John says."

You should have seen Fred's

face. "Say, are you guys trying to pull my leg?" Fred's not one to fool with; he doesn't go for practical jokes.

"It's God's honest truth," John told him. "If you don't believe us, go take a look for yourself."

Well, Fred said he'd think about it. He's a cautious soul, especially when he thinks that someone's trying to play a joke on him. I think that he didn't believe either one of us.

That afternoon, though, a messenger came over from the office with a requisition. He was just a kid, didn't look old enough to have working papers, even; but I guess that he had them, or he wouldn't be working here. The front office is pretty strict about that sort of thing. Anyway, this kid was practically bug-eyed from laughing.

One of the guys called Fred, and when he came over, even before the kid handed him the requisition, he said to Fred, "Have you seen the door?"

"What door?" Fred asked, reaching for the envelope the kid had.

"The door that the carpenters are building over by the cafeteria. Just a door, standing there all by itself."

Fred glanced at John, who was very careful to keep an 'I-told-you-so' look off his face. After all, Fred's the foreman of the shop.

"I heard about it," Fred said to the kid.

Now, from his tone of voice, all of us in the shop knew that he was irked, and we'd have kept out of his way. This stupid kid, though, didn't know Fred like we did, so he kept right on. "What do you think it is?"

Fred didn't bother to answer. He had ripped open the envelope and was studying the requisition.

"Why would anyone build just a doorway?" the kid asked.

"I wouldn't know," Fred cut him off.

Still that kid persisted. "Do you think they're going to build a building around the door?"

"Listen, kid, it's none of my business, and none of yours," Fred snapped. "Forget it."

Finally that young punk caught on, and he said, "Yes, sir," in a subdued tone and that was that.

We didn't say anything more to Fred about the door, either.

NEXT DAY, Friday, we saw that the door was nearly finished. The carpenters were doing a good job; but it did seem a little silly. The word had gotten around the plant about the door — probably that messenger had spread the word — and there was quite a gang congregated there, watching the men work and making comments.

One joker suggested, "I know what it is. It's a door in a glass

house. The glass is so transparent that you can't see the walls."

"Naw, can't be that, Joe. I'll bet they're going to build the building around the thing — do it the hard way. Now, down in the plumbing shop, we don't operate that way."

"Maybe you should," someone suggested. "That would look good — pipes and bathtubs and sinks hanging in midair, with no building around them."

A voice in the back of the mob yelled, "Put it in the suggestion box, Herman!"

The carpenters ignored this, though; they just worked on, getting that door finished.

When we came back on Monday, everyone was talking about the door. We could hardly wait until lunch time, because we wondered what was being done to the door this time. John and I even decided to take an early lunch just to get to that door a little sooner.

A locksmith was hard at work, and John moved up close to watch. John's real interested in locks; they're kind of a hobby with him. He watched for a few minutes in silence, and then we went off to lunch.

"That sure is a super-duper lock he's putting on that door," John commented. "I've never seen one quite like it."

A couple of guys we knew came over and sat down at our table. All they could talk about was THE DOOR. By this time

everyone was thinking about it in capital letters.

One of the guys, Jimmie, was quite a kidder. He glanced cautiously around at the tables next to us to be sure that no one could hear him, and then he said confidentially, "I've just heard the inside dope on the door."

We were all ears.

"It's the door of opportunity," he said, "just waiting for you guys to rap on it."

TUESDAY WE FOUND that the door was finished. The carpenters were gone, and in their place were a couple of painters. They were slapping paint on that door as if their lives depended on it. The inevitable crowd had gathered. This time the consensus was that The Old Man had wanted the door so that he could have an extra door to slam when he got mad.

Everybody in the plant was speculating about the thing. I guess that the word must have gotten up high, because, suddenly, on Thursday, June 12, a notice came around and Fred posted it on the bulletin board. What a notice — top official, signed by no less than J. B. Hodge, himself. In case you didn't know, J. B. Hodge is The Old Man. The notice said in effect that The Old Man had gotten interested in a new kind of burglar-proof lock that some scientist, Dr. Fontini, had per-

fected. He decided that he'd like to see it demonstrated, so he had this door built, and Dr. Fontini had installed the lock. Next day, Friday, June 13, at three P.M., there was to be an official demonstration of the lock. Everyone was to go.

Well, Fred was kind of burned up, because he had a lot of orders to make up; but when The Old Man said 'jump', we all jumped. So, at five of three, we shut up shop and took off in a body for the door.

All of the wheels were there, including The Old Man, himself, and the little guy we'd seen installing the lock. The Old Man introduced this guy as Dr. Fontini, and he made a little speech about this new lock of his.

When the doc had finished, he said, "I guarantee this lock to be burglar proof. Nobody can go through this door when the lock is set. I challenge anyone to try to do this."

"Any of you men who can get through this door will get an extra day's pay." The Old Man announced with that big-business-playing-Santa-Claus look on his face.

Well, a couple of the guys tried, but no soap. That lock was really something.

Then John said to me, "I think I'll try it."

"Don't be a sucker, John. You won't do any better than the rest of the guys," I warned.

"I watched him put that lock in. I'll bet I can get it open."

Well, John stepped up and volunteered. Dr. Fontini was smiling smugly, but John didn't let that bother him in the least. He pulled a piece of wire out of his pocket, and began tinkering with that lock. Five minutes passed, and then ten minutes. I could see that The Old Man was beginning to get impatient, when there was a loud click, and the door swung open in John's hand.

"Open, Sesame," he said, while Dr. Fontini glared at him, and The Old Man glared at Fontini. The Old Man had gone to a lot of expense putting up that door, and he hated to waste money.

Some way in the crowd yelled, "Well, you've got it open, go on through it, John."

JOHN GRINNED and looked toward The Old Man. Mr. Hodge waved his O. K., so John stepped through the doorway. Then this little guy, Fontini, gives a yowl of rage, jumps through the door after John, and slams it shut. As the door shut and the lock clicked, John and the doctor disappeared into thin air. Just like that — they were there, and then they weren't. There were guys standing on the other side of that doorway, too, and they vouched for the fact that John and the doctor started through the door, and that's the last anyone ever saw of hem. The door had swung shut and

locked itself, and no one could get it open.

The door still stands there, weatherbeaten, paint peeling, frame warping. It's still locked,

and John has never returned. The Old Man won't have it torn down, because he says that John might want to come back through that door some day.

New Frontiers Beyond The Compass of Science

SOMETHING IN THE SKIN

A Second Look At Stigmata

by Edward D. Hoch

THE CREATION OF A SOLAR SYSTEM

by Dr. John Manas

SPIRITS OF THE SOUTH	<i>Robbye Lee Brewer</i>
GHOSTS IN MY BEDROOM	<i>Paul T. Collins</i>
PEOPLE WHO DISAPPEAR	<i>Brad Steiger</i>
TALES OF THE SEA	<i>E. M. Marshall</i>
THE LAW OF ETERNAL PROGRESS	<i>Jerryl L. Keane, Ph.D.</i>
THE HAUNTED ID	<i>The Rev. Allen Spraggett</i>

Don't Miss The January 1964 Issue Of

exploring
THE UNKNOWN

One Summer Night

by Ambrose Bierce

A cheerfully sardonic vignette from "Can Such Things Be?"

THE FACT THAT Henry Armstrong was buried did not seem to prove that he was dead; he had always been a hard man to convince. That he was really buried, the testimony of his senses compelled him to admit. His posture — flat upon his back, with his hands crossed on his stomach and tied with something that he easily broke without profitably altering the situation — the strict confinement of his entire person, the black darkness and profound silence, made a body of evidence impossible to controvert and he accepted it without cavil.

But dead — no; he was only very, very ill. He had, withal, the invalid's apathy and did not greatly concern himself about the uncommon fate that had been allotted to him. No philosopher was he — just a plain, commonplace person gifted, for the time being, with a pathological indifference: the organ that he feared consequences with was torpid. So, with no particular apprehension for his immediate future, he fell asleep and all was peace with Henry Armstrong.

But something was going on overhead. It was a dark summer

night, shot through with infrequent shimmers of lightning silently firing a cloud lying low in the west and portending a storm. There brief, stammering illuminations brought out with ghastly distinctness the monuments and headstones of the cemetery and seemed to set them dancing. It was not a night in which any credible witness was likely to be straying about a cemetery, so the three men who were there, digging into the grave of Henry Armstrong, felt reasonably secure.

Two of them were young students from a medical college a few miles away; the third was a gigantic man known as Jess. For many years Jess had been employed about the cemetery as a man-of-all-work and it was his favorite pleasantry that he knew "every soul in the place." From the nature of what he was now doing it was inferable that the place was not so populous as its register may have shown it to be.

Outside the wall, at the part of the grounds farthest from the public road, were a horse and a light wagon, waiting.

The work of excavation was not difficult: the earth with which the grave had been loosely filled a few hours before offered little resistance and was soon thrown out. Removal of the casket from its box was less easy, but it was taken out, for

it was a perquisite of Jess, who carefully unscrewed the cover and laid it aside, exposing the body in black trousers and white shirt. At that instant the air sprang to flame, a crackling shock of thunder stunned the world and Henry Armstrong tranquilly sat up. With inarticulate cries, the men fled in terror, each in a different direction. For nothing on earth could two of them have been persuaded to return. But Jess was of another breed.

In the gray of the morning the two students, pallid and haggard from anxiety and with the terror of their adventure still beating tumultuously in their blood, met at the medical college.

"You saw it?" cried one.

"God! yes — what are we to do?"

They went around to the rear of the building, where they saw a horse, attached to a light wagon, hitched to a gatepost near the door of the dissecting room. Mechanically they entered the room. On a bench in the obscurity sat Jess. He rose, grinning, all eyes and teeth.

"I'm waiting for my pay," he said.

Stretched naked on a long table lay the body of Henry Armstrong, the head defiled with blood and clay from a blow with a spade.

Luella Miller

by Mary Wilkins-Freeman

This story comes from a collection entitled "The Wind In The Rose-Bush," which went through several printings (the one I have is dated 1907, the earliest copyright listed, 1902); and at this time, the author was listed as Mary E. Wilkins. At one time a secretary to the elder Oliver Wendell Holmes, Mary Eleanor Wilkins married late in life; she was known as Mary Wilkins-Freeman when I studied literature in high school, and had died just recently. Her entire life was spent in New England, and although she wrote a dozen novels, it is the short story wherein she was memorable. There are several collections of these, but "The Wind In The Rose-Bush" is entirely devoted to the weird and uncanny. The present history of Luella Miller is typical of the author's quiet presentation of horror, which is nonetheless effective for lack of spectacular spookerie. Evidence abounds that there are such people as Luella Miller. . . .

CLOSE TO THE village street stood the one-story house in which Luella Miller, who had an evil name in the village, had dwelt. She had been dead for years, yet there were those in the village who, in spite of the clearer light which comes on a vantage-point from a long-past danger, half believed in

the tale which they had heard from their childhood. In their hearts, although they scarcely would have owned it, was a survival of the wild horror and frenzied fear of their ancestors who had dwelt in the same age with Luella Miller.

Young people even would stare with a shudder at the old house

as they passed, and children never played around it as was their wont around an untenanted building. Not a window in the old Miller house was broken: the panes reflected the morning sunlight in patches of emerald and blue, and the latch of the sagging front door was never lifted, although no bolt secured it. Since Luella Miller had been carried out of it, the house had had no tenant except one friendless old soul who had no choice between that and the far-off shelter of the open sky. This old woman, who had survived her kindred and friends, lived in the house one week, then one morning no smoke came out of the chimney, and a body of neighbors, a score strong, entered and found her dead in her bed.

There were dark whispers as to the cause of her death, and there were those who testified to an expression of fear so exalted that it showed forth the state of the departing soul upon the dead face. The old woman had been hale and hearty when she entered the house, and in seven days she was dead; it seemed that she had fallen a victim to some uncanny power. The minister talked in the pulpit with covert severity against the sin of superstition; still the belief prevailed. Not a soul in the village but would have chosen the almshouse rather than that dwelling. No vagrant, if he

heard the tale, would seek shelter beneath that old roof, unhallowed by nearly half a century of superstitious fear.

THERE WAS ONLY one person in the village who had actually known Luella Miller. That person was a woman well over eighty, but a marvel of vitality and unextinct youth. Straight as an arrow, with the spring of one recently let loose from the bow of life, she moved about the streets, and she always went to church, rain or shine. She had never married, and had lived alone for years in a house across the road from Luella Miller's.

This woman had none of the garrulousness of age, but never in all her life had she ever held her tongue for any will save her own, and she never spared the truth when she essayed to present it. She it was who bore testimony to the life, evil, though possibly unwittingly or undesignedly so, of Luella Miller, and to her personal appearance. When this old woman spoke — and she had the gift of description, although her thoughts were clothed in the rude vernacular of her native village — one could seem to see Luella Miller as she had really looked.

According to this woman, Lydia Anderson by name, Luella Miller had been a beauty of a type rather unusual in New England. She had been a slight, pliant sort of creature, as ready

with a strong yielding to fate and as unbreakable as a willow. She had glimmering lengths of straight, fair hair, which she wore softly looped round a long, lovely face. She had blue eyes full of soft pleading, little slender, clinging hands, and a wonderful grace of motion and attitude.

"Luella Miller used to sit in a way nobody else could if they sat up and studied a week of Sundays," said Lydia Anderson, "and it was a sight to see her walk. If one of them willows over there on the edge of the brook could start up and get its roots free of the ground, and move off, it would go just the way Luella Miller used to. She had a green shot silk she used to wear, too, and a hat with green ribbon streamers, and a lace veil blowing across her face and out sideways, and a green ribbon flyin' from her waist. That was what she came out bride in when she married Erastus Miller.

"Her name before she was married was Hill. There was always a sight of 'I's' in her name, married or single. Erastus Miller was good lookin', too, better lookin' than Luella. Sometimes I used to think that Luella wa'n't so handsome after all. Erastus just worshipped her. I used to know him pretty well. He lived next door to me, and we went to school together. Folks used to say he was waitin' on me, but

he wa'n't. I never thought he was except once or twice when he said things that some girls might have suspected meant somethin'. That was before Luella came here to teach the district school.

"IT WAS FUNNY how she came to get it, for folks said she hadn't any education, and that one of the big girls, Lottie Henderson, used to do all the teachin' for her, while she sat back and did embroidery work on a cambric pocket-handkerchief. Lottie Henderson was a real smart girl, a splendid scholar, and she just set her eyes by Luella, as all the girls did. Lottie would have made a real smart woman, but she died when Luella had been here about a year nobody knew what ailed her. She dragged herself to that schoolhouse and helped Luella teach till the very last minute. The committee all knew how Luella didn't do much of the work herself, but they winked at it. It wa'n't long after Lottie died that Erastus married her. I always thought he hurried it up because she wa'n't fit to teach.

"One of the big boys used to help her after Lottie died, but he hadn't much government, and the school didn't do very well, and Luella might have had to give it up, for the committee couldn't have shut their eyes to things much longer. The boy

that helped her was a real honest, innocent sort of fellow, and he was a good scholar, too. Folks said he overstudied, and that was the reason he was took crazy the year after Luella married, but I don't know. And I don't know what made Erastus Miller go into consumption of the blood the year after he was married: consumption wa'n't in his family. He just grew weaker and weaker, and went almost bent double when he tried to wait on Luella, and he spoke feeble, like an old man. He worked terrible hard till the last trying to save up a little to leave Luella. I've seen him out in the worst storms on a wood-sled — he used to cut and sell wood — and he was hunched up on top lookin' more dead than alive.

"Once I couldn't stand it: I went over and helped him pitch some wood on the cart — I was always strong in my arms. I wouldn't stop for all he told me to, and I guess he was glad enough for the help. That was only a week before he died. He fell on the kitchen floor while he was gettin' breakfast. He always got the breakfast and let Luella lay abed. He did all the sweepin' and the washin' and the ironin' and most of the cookin'. He couldn't bear to have Luella lift her finger, and she let him do for her. She lived like a queen for all the work she did. She didn't even do her

sewin'. She said it made her shoulder ache to sew, and poor Erastus's sister Lily used to do all her sewin'. She wa'n't able to, either; she was never strong in her back, but she did it beautifully. She had to, to suit Luella, she was so dreadful particular.

"I never saw anythin' like the fagottin' and hemstitchin' that Lily Miller did for Luella. She made all Luella's weddin' outfit, and that green silk dress, after Maria Babbit cut it. Maria she cut it for nothin', and she did a lot more cuttin' and fittin' for nothin' for Luella, too. Lily Miller went to live with Luella after Erastus died. She gave up her home, though she was real attached to it and wa'n't a mite afraid to stay alone. She rented it and she went to live with Luella right away after the funeral."

THEN THIS OLD woman, Lydia Anderson, who remembered Luella Miller, would go on to relate the story of Lily Miller. It seemed that on the removal of Lily Miller to the house of her dead brother, to live with his widow, the village people first began to talk. This Lily Miller had been hardly past her first youth, and a most robust and blooming woman, rosy-cheeked, with curls of strong, black hair overshadowing round, candid temples and bright dark eyes. It was not six

months after she had taken up her residence with her sister-in-law that her rosy color faded and her pretty curves became wan hollows. White shadows began to show in the black rings of her hair, and the light died out of her eyes, her features sharpened, and there were pathetic lines at her mouth, which yet wore always an expression of sweetness and even happiness. She was devoted to her sister; there was no doubt that she loved her with her whole heart, and was perfectly content in her service. It was her sole anxiety lest she should die and leave her alone.

"The way Lily Miller used to talk about Luella was enough to make you cry," said Lydia Anderson. "I've been in there sometimes toward the last when she was too feeble to cook and carried her some blanc-mange or custard — somethin' I thought she might relish, and she'd thank me, and when I asked her how she was, say she felt better than she did yesterday, and asked me if I didn't think she looked better, dreadful pitiful, and say poor Luella had an awful time takin' care of her and doin' the work — she wa'n't strong enough to do anythin' — when all the time Luella wa'n't liftin' her finger and poor Lily didn't get any care except what the neighbors gave her, and Luella eat up everythin' that was carried in for Lily.

"I had it real straight that she did. Luella used to just sit and cry and do nothin'. She did act real fond of Lily, and she pined away considerable, too. There was those that thought she'd go into a decline herself. But after Lily died, her Aunt Abby Mixter came, and then Luella picked up and grew as fat and rosy as ever. But poor Aunt Abby begun to droop just the way Lily had, and I guess somebody wrote to her married daughter, Mrs. Sam Abbot, who lived in Barre, for she wrote her mother that she must leave right away and come and make her a visit, but Aunt Abby wouldn't go.

"I can see her now. She was a real good-lookin' woman, tall and large, with a big, square face and a high forehead that looked of itself kind of benevolent and good. She just tended out on Luella as if she had been a baby, and when her married daughter sent for her she wouldn't stir one inch. She'd always thought a lot of her daughter, too, but she said Luella needed her and her married daughter didn't. Her daughter kept writin' and writin', but it didn't do any good. Finally she came, and when she saw how bad her mother looked, she broke down and cried and all but went on her knees to have her come away. She spoke her mind out to Luella, too. She told her that she'd killed her husband and everybody that

had anythin' to do with her, and she'd thank her to leave her mother alone. Luella went into hysterics, and Aunt Abby was so frightened that she called me after her daughter went. Mrs. Sam Abbot she went away fairly cryin' out loud in the buggy, the neighbors heard her, and well she might, for she never saw her mother again alive.

"I WENT IN that night when Aunt Abby called for me, standin' in the door with her little green-checked shawl over her head. I can see her now. "Do come over her, Miss Anderson," she sung out, kind of gasping for breath. I didn't stop for anythin'. I put over as fast as I could, and when I got there, there was Luella laughin' and cryin' all together, and Aunt Abby trying to hush her, and all the time she herself was white as a sheet and shakin' so she could hardly stand. 'For the land sakes, Mrs. Mixer,' says I, 'you look worse than she does. You ain't fit to be up out of your bed.'

"'Oh, there ain't anything the matter with me,' says she. Then she went on talkin' to Luella. 'There, there, don't, don't, poor little lamb,' says she. 'Aunt Abby is here. She ain't goin' away and leave you. Don't, poor little lamb.'

"'Do leave her with me, Mrs. Mixer, and you get back to bed,' says I, for Aunt Abby had

been layin' down considerable lately, though somehow she contrived to do the work.

"'I'm well enough,' says she. 'Don't you think she had better have the doctor, Miss Anderson?'

"'The doctor,' says I, 'I think *you* had better have the doctor. I think you need him much worse than some folks I could mention.' And I looked right straight at Luella Miller laughin' and cryin' and goin' on as if she was the center of all creation. All the time she was actin' so — seemed as if she was too sick to sense anythin' — she was keepin' a sharp lookout as to how we took it out of the corner of one eye. I see her. You could never cheat me about Luella Miller.

"Finally I got real mad and I run home and I got a bottle of valerian I had, and I poured some boilin' hot water on a handful of catnip, and I mixed up that catnip tea with most half a wineglass of valerian, and I went with it over to Luella's. I marched right up to Luella, a-holdin' out of that cup, all smokin'. 'Now,' says I, 'Luella Miller, *'you swaller this!*'

"'What is — what is it, oh, what is it?' she sort of screeches out. Then she goes off a-laughin' enough to kill.

"'Poor lamb, poor little lamb,' says Aunt Abby, standin' over her, all kind of tottery, and

tryin' to bathe her head with camphor.

"*You swaller this right down,*" says I. And I didn't waste any ceremony. I just took hold of Luella Miller's chin and I tipped her head back, and I caught her mouth open with laughin', and I clapped that cup to her lips, and I fairly hollered at her: 'Swaller, swaller, swaller!' and she gulped it right down. She had to, and I guess it did her good. Anyhow, she stopped cryin' and laughin' and let me put her to bed, and she went to sleep like a baby inside of half an hour. That was more than poor Aunt Abby did. She lay awake all that night and I stayed with her, though she tried not to have me; said she wa'n't sick enough for watchers. But I stayed, and I made some good cornmeal gruel and I fed her a teaspoon every little while all night long. It seemed to me as if she was jest dying from bein' all wore out.

"IN THE MORNIN'" as soon as it was light I run over to the Bisbees and sent Johnny Bisbee for the doctor. I told him to tell the doctor to hurry, and he come pretty quick. Poor Aunt Abby didn't seem to know much of anythin' when he got there. You couldn't hardly tell she breathed, she was so used up. When the doctor had gone, Luella came into the room lookin' like a baby in her ruffled night-

gown. I can see her now. Her eyes were as blue and her face all pink and white like a blossom, and she looked at Aunt Abby in the bed sort of innocent and surprised. 'Why,' says she, 'Aunt Abby ain't got up yet?'

"'No, she ain't,' says I, pretty short.

"'I thought I didn't smell the coffee,' say Luella.

"'Coffee,' says I. 'I guess if you have coffee this mornin' you'll make it yourself.'

"'I never made the coffee in all my life,' says she, dreadful astonished. 'Erastus always made the coffee as long as he lived, and then Lily she made it, and then Aunt Abby made it. I don't believe I *can* make the coffee, Miss Anderson.'

"'You can make it or go without, jest as you please,' says I.

"'Ain't Aunt Abby goin' to get up?' says she.

"'I guess she won't get up,' says I, 'sick as she is.' I was gettin' madder and madder. There was somethin' about that little pink-and-white thing standin' there and talkin' about coffee, when she had killed so many better folks than she was, and had jest killed another, that made me feel 'most as if I wished somebody would up and kill her before she had a chance to do any more harm.

"'Is Aunt Abby sick?' says Luella, as if she was sort of agrieved and injured.

"'Yes,' says I, 'she's sick, and

she's goin' to die, and then you'll be left alone, and you'll have to do for yourself and wait on yourself, or do without things.' I don't know but I was sort of hard, but it was the truth, and if I was any harder than Luella Miller had been I'll give up. I ain't never been sorry that I said it.

"Well, Luella, she up and had hysterics again at that, and I jest let her have 'em. All I did was to bundle her into the room on the other side of the entry where Aunt Abby couldn't hear her, if she wa'n't past it — I don't know but she was — and set her down hard in a chair and told her not to come back into the other room, and she minded. She had her hysterics in there till she got tired. When she found out that nobody was comin' to coddle her and do for her she stopped. At least I suppose she did. I had all I could do with poor Aunt Abby tryin' to keep the breath of life in her. The doctor had told me that she was dreadful low, and give me some very strong medicine to give her in drops real often, and told me real particular about the nourishment.

"Well, I did as he told me real faithful till she wa'n't able to swallow any longer. Then I had her daughter sent for. I had begun to realize that she wouldn't last any time at all. I hadn't realized it before, though I spoke to Luella the way I did.

The doctor he came, and Mrs. Sam Abbot, but when she got there it was too late; her mother was dead. Aunt Abby's daughter just give one look at her mother layin' there, then she turned sort of sharp and sudden and looked at me.

"Where is she?" says she, and I knew she meant Luella.

"She's out in the kitchen," says I. 'She's too nervous to see folks die. She's afraid it will make her sick.'

"THE DOCTOR he speaks up then. He was a young man. Old Doctor Park had died the year before, and this was a young fellow just out of college. 'Mrs. Miller is not strong,' says he, kind of severe, and she is quite right in not agitating herself.'

"You are another, young man; she's got her pretty claw on you,' thinks I, but I didn't say anythin' to him. I just said over to Mrs. Sam Abbot that Luella was in the kitchen, and Mrs. Sam Abbot she went out there, and I went, too, and I never heard anythin' like the way she talked to Luella myself, but this was more than I ever would have dared to say. Luella she was too scared to go into hysterics. She jest flopped. She seemed to jest shrink away to nothin' in that kitchen chair, with Mrs. Sam Abbot standin' over her and talkin' and tellin' her the truth.

"I guess the truth was most too much for her and no mistake, because Luella presently actually did faint away; and there wa'n't any sham about it, the way I always suspected there was about them hysterics. She fainted dead away and we had to lay her flat on the floor, and the Doctor he came runnin' out and he said somethin' about a weak heart dreadful fierce to Mrs. Sam Abbot, but she wa'n't a mite scared. She faced him jest as white as even Luella was layin' there lookin' like death and the Doctor feelin' of her pulse.

"'Weak heart,' says she, 'weak heart; weak fiddlesticks! There ain't nothin' weak about that woman. She's got strength enough to hang onto other folks till she kills 'em. Weak? It was my poor mother that was weak: this woman killed her as sure as if she had taken a knife to her.'

"But the Doctor he didn't pay much attention. He was bendin' over Luella layin' there with her yellow hair all streamin' and her pretty pink-and-white face all pale, and her blue eyes like stars gone out, and he was holdin' onto her hand and smoothin' her forehead, and tellin' me to get the brandy in Aunt Abby's room, and I was sure as I wanted to be that Luella had got somebody else to hang onto, now Aunt Abby was gone, and I thought of poor Erastus Mil-

ler, and I sort of pitied the poor young Doctor, led away by a pretty face, and I made up my mind I'd see what I could do.

"I WAITED TILL Aunt Abby had been dead and buried about a month, and the Doctor was goin' to see Luella steady and folks were beginnin' to talk; then one evenin', when I knew the Doctor had been called out of town and wouldn't be round, I went over to Luella's. I found her all dressed up in a blue muslin with white polka dots on it, and her hair curled jest as pretty, and there wa'n't a young girl in the place could compare with her. There was somethin' about Luella Miller seemed to draw it out of *me*. She was settin' rocking in the chair by her sittin'-room window, and Maria Brown had gone home. Maria Brown had been in to help her, or rather to do the work, for Luella wa'n't helped when she didn't do anythin'.

"Marie Brown was real capable and she didn't have any ties; she wa'n't married, and lived alone, so she'd offered. I couldn't see why she should do the work any more than Luella; she wa'n't any too strong; but she seemed to think so, too, so she went over and did all the work — washed, and ironed, and baked, while Luella sat and rocked. Maria didn't live long afterward. She began to fade away just the same fashion the

others had. Well, she. was warned, but she acted real mad when folks said anythin': said Luella was a poor, abused woman, too delicate to help herself, and they'd ought to be ashamed, and if she died helpin' them that couldn't help themselves she would — and she did.

"I s'pose Maria has gone home," say I to Luella, when I had gone in and sat down opposite her.

"Yes, Maria went half an hour ago, after she had got supper and washed the dishes," says Luella, in her pretty way.

"I suppose she has got a lot of work to do in her own house tonight," says I, kind of bitter, but that was all thrown away on Luella Miller. It seemed to her right that other folks that wa'n't any better able than she was herself should wait on her, and she couldn't get it through her head that anybody should think it *wa'n't* right.

"Yes," says Luella, real sweet and pretty, 'yes, she said she had to do her washin' tonight. She has let it go for a fortnight along of comin' over here.'

"Why don't she stay home and do her washin' instead of comin' over here and doin' *your* work, when you are just as well able, and enough sight more so, than she is to do it?" says I.

"Then Luella she looked at me like a baby who has a rattles shook at it. She sort of laughed as innocent as you

please. 'Oh, I can't do the work myself, Miss Anderson,' says she. 'I never did, Maria *has* to do it.'

"Then I spoke out: 'Has to do it!' says I. 'Has to do it!' She don't have to do it, either. Maria Brown has her own home and enough to live on. She ain't beholden to you to come over here and slave for you and kill herself.'

"Luella she jest set and stared at me for all the world like a doll-baby that was so abused that it was comin' to life.

"Yes," says I, 'she's killin' herself. She's goin' to die just the way Erastus did, and Lily, and your Aunt Abby. You're killin' her jest as you did them. I don't know what there is about you, but you seem to bring a curse,' says I. 'You kill everybody that is fool enough to care anythin' about you and do for you.'

"SHE STARED AT me and she was pretty pale.

'And Maria ain't the only one you're goin' to kill,' says I. 'You're goin' to kill Doctor Malcolm before you're done with him.'

"Then a red color came flamin' all over her face. 'I ain't goin' to kill him, either,' says she, and she begun to cry.

"Yes, you *be*," says I. Then I spoke as I had never spoke before. You see, I felt it on account of Erastus. I told her that

she hadn't any business to think of another man after she'd been married to one that had died for her: that she was a dreadful woman; and she was, that's true enough, but sometimes I have wondered lately if she knew it — if she wa'n't like a baby with scissors in its hand cuttin' everybody without knowin' what it was doin'.

"Luella she kept gettin' paler and paler, and she never took her eyes off my face. There was somethin' awful about the way she looked at me and never spoke one word. After a while I quit talkin' and I went home. I watched that night, but her lamp went out before nine o'clock, and when Doctor Malcom came drivin' past and sort of slowed up he seen there wa'n't any light and he drove along. I saw her sort of shy out of meetin' the next Sunday, too, so he shouldn't go home with her, and I begun to think mebbe she did have some conscience after all. It was only a week after that that Maria Brown died — sort of sudden at the last, though everybody had seen it was comin'.

"Well, then there was a good deal of feelin' and pretty dark whispers. Folks said the days of witchcraft had come again, and they were pretty shy of Luella. She acted sort of offish to the Doctor and he didn't go there, and there wa'n't anybody to do anythin' for her. I don't

know how she *did* get along. I wouldn't go in there and offer to help her — not because I was afraid of dyin' like the rest, but I thought she was just as well able to do her own work as I was to do it for her, and I thought it was about time that she did it and stopped killin' other folks. But it wa'n't very long before folks began to say that Luella herself was goin' in to a decline jest the way her husband, and Lily, and Aunt Abby and the others had, and I saw myself that she looked pretty bad. I used to see her goin' past from the store with a bundle as if she could hardly crawl, but I remembered how Erastus used to wait and 'tend when he couldn't hardly put one foot before the other, and I didn't go out to help her.

"But at last one afternoon I saw the Doctor come drivin' up like mad with his medicine chest, and Mrs. Babbit came in after supper and said that Luella was real sick.

"'I'd offer to go in and nurse her,' says she, 'but I've got my children to consider, and mebbe it ain't true what they say, but it's queer how many folks that have done for her have died.'

"I DIDN'T SAY anythin', but I considered how she had been Erastus's wife and how he had set his eyes by her, and I made up my mind to go in the next mornin', unless she was better,

and see what I could do; but the next mornin' I see her at the window, and pretty soon she came steppin' out as spry as you please, and a little while afterward Mrs. Babbit came in and told me that the Doctor had got a girl from out of town, a Sara Jones, to come there, and she said she was pretty sure that the Doctor was goin' to marry Luella.

"I saw him kiss her in the door that night myself, and I knew it was true. The woman came that afternoon, and the way she flew around was a caution. I don't believe Luella had swept since Maria died. She swept and dusted, and washed and ironed; wet clothes and dusters and carpets were flyin' over there all day, and every time Luella set her foot out when the Doctor wa'n't there was that Sarah Jones helpin' of her up and down the steps, as if she hadn't learned to walk.

"Well, everybody knew that Luella and the Doctor were goin' to be married, but it wa'n't long before they began to talk about his lookin' so poorly, jest as they had about the others; and they talked about Sarah Jones, too.

"Well, the Doctor did die, and he wanted to be married first, so as to leave what little he had to Luella, but he died before the minister could get there, and Sarah Jones died a week afterward.

"Well, that wound up everything for Luella Miller. Not another soul in the whole town would lift a finger for her. There got to be a sort of panic. Then she began to droop in good earnest. She used to have to go to the store herself, for Mrs. Babbit was afraid to let Tommy go for her, and I've seen her goin' past and stoppin' every two or three steps to rest. Well, I stood it as long as I could, but one day I see her comin' with her arms full and stoppin' to lean against the Babbit fence, and I run out and took her bundles and carried them to her house. Then I went home and never spoke one word to her though she called after me dreadful kind of pitiful. Well, that night I was taken sick with a chill, and I was sick as I wanted to be for two weeks. Mrs. Babbit had seen me run out to help Luella and she came in and told me I was goin' to die on account of it. I didn't know whether I was or not, but I considered I had done right by Erastus's wife.

"That last two weeks Luella she had a dreadful hard time, I guess. She was pretty sick, and as near as I could make out nobody dared go near her. I don't know as she was really needin' anythin' very much, for there was enough to eat in her house and it was warm weather, and she made out to cook a little flour gruel every day, I know,

but I guess she had a hard time, she that had been so petted and done for all her life.

"When I got so I could go out I went over there one morning. Mrs. Babbit had just come in to say she hadn't seen any smoke and she didn't know but it was somebody's duty to go in, but she couldn't help thinkin' of her children, and I got right up, though I hadn't been out of the house for two weeks, and I went in there, and Luella she was layin' on the bed, and she was dyin'.

"She lasted all that day and into the night. But I sat there after the new doctor had gone away. Nobody else dared to go there. It was about midnight that I left her for a minute to run home and get some medicine I had been takin', for I begun to feel rather bad.

"It was a full moon that night, and just as I started out of my door to cross the street back to Luella's, I stopped short, for I saw something."

LYDIA ANDERSON at this juncture always said with a certain defiance that she did not expect to be believed, and then proceeded in a hushed voice:

"I saw what I saw, and I know I saw it, and I will swear on my death bed that I saw it. I saw Luella Miller and Erastus Miller, and Lily, and Aunt Abby, and Maria, and the Doctor,

and Sarah, all goin' out of her door, and all but Luella shone white in the moonlight, and they were all helpin' her along till she seemed to fairly fly in the midst of them. Then it all disappeared. I stood a minute with my heart poundin', then I went over there. I thought of goin' for Mrs. Babbit, but I thought she'd be afraid. So I went alone, though I knew what had happened. Luella was layin' real peaceful, dead on her bed."

This was the story that the old woman, Lydia Anderson told, but the sequel was told by the people who survived her, and this is the tale which has become folklore in the village.

Lydia Anderson died when she was eighty-seven. She had continued wonderfully hale and hearty for one of her years until about two weeks before her death.

One bright moonlight evening she was sitting beside a window in her parlor when she made a sudden exclamation, and was out of the house and across the street before the neighbor who was taking care of her could stop her. She followed as fast as possible and found Lydia Anderson stretched on the ground before the door of Luella Miller's deserted house, and she was quite dead.

The next night there was a red gleam of fire athwart the moonlight and the old house of

Luella Miller was burned to the ground. Nothing is now left of it except a few old cellar stones and a lilac bush, and in summer

a helpless trail of morning glories among the weeds, which might be considered emblematic of Luella herself.

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They That Wait

by H. S. W. Chibbett

We do not recall having seen any of this author's works in American publications, although he appears to be rather well known in the United Kingdom. In both science and weird fiction, the tale of the experiment which has interestingly unexpected and horrifying consequences is well known — but then, there is no such thing as a completely original theme in any sort of fiction. (I say completely in the categorical sense). We think you will find Mr. Chibbett's working out of the theme quite individual.

"G'AFTERNOON, Alvin," said a voice at my side.

I glanced sideways at the speaker. "Hello, Jim! Where have you been lately? I haven't seen anything of you since the tennis season started, months ago. Your flat was empty, and I had no idea where to find you."

Jim Lestrangle nodded abstractedly. "That's right," he said, "I've been too — busy — to get in touch with you."

Jim was known at the Wensley Tennis Club as an eccentric, and most members steered clear of him. People are like that, when they come in contact with someone or something they don't understand. And Jim was certainly an unusual person, and a man of great versatility. The Club tolerated him because he was undoubtedly a first-class tennis player. Rows of silver cups on his mantelpiece testified to his ability in that direc-

tion. In addition, he was a fine chess player, and a Bridge expert. He possessed all the qualifications necessary to be popular, and undoubtedly he would have been so had it not been for his other interests.

At first, people had been inclined to scoff at the tales which began to be circulated about him soon after he joined the Wensley Club. No one appeared to know how these stories originated. Certainly they did not come from Jim himself, yet the most outrageous rumors were being freely spread. It was whispered that on one occasion he had smashed a wine-glass at the Club Bar, merely by looking at it. Then Carstairs, the Secretary, alleged that once he heard a low conversation going on in the table-tennis room, but when he entered, only Lestranger was there. And there were many other strange occurrences, either real or imaginary, which were attributed to the new member. Stories of his having been seen in the company of mediums of ill repute, and strange-looking turbaned aliens about whom nothing was known.

I admit that all these stories considered separately amounted to nothing tangible, nothing upon which one could have based any conclusion worthy of the name. Yet undoubtedly their cumulative effect was such that after a time it became difficult

to make up sets to include Jim. You will understand that nothing was *said* against him, but people would make the most obvious excuses for being dropped to the next set. The women would plead a sudden headache, or the men would suddenly find it necessary to make an urgent telephone call.

Jim remained sublimely indifferent to these undercurrents of suspicion and dislike. He must have noticed it, of course; and perhaps because I showed by my manner that I did not share the general aversion to his company, he began to cultivate my friendship.

Truth to tell, I was more than a little flattered, even though the other members began to drop little hints and warnings; and then, when they saw it was useless, began to shun me, too. Jim Lestranger was undoubtedly a man of vast erudition. When I got to know him better, he invited me round to his flat off Berners Street. Seated in leatherbacked arm-chairs, we would discuss all sorts of subjects, and I would be amazed continually by the profundity of his knowledge. Every now and then he would elevate his spare, lanky form from the luxurious depths of his chair and withdraw a book from one of his well-stocked bookshelves to amplify or confirm a point at issue.

Those long rows of bound

volumes fascinated me, I must confess. I used to spend long hours browsing among them especially when Jim was engaged on experiments in his laboratory. Very few of them could have been obtained at a public library; none but a student of occult lore would have had access to such sources of knowledge. Many of the books were inscribed in Hebrew, Latin, Sanskrit, and other ancient languages with which I had little acquaintance.

I HAD NO idea of the nature of the experiments upon which Jim Lestrangle was engaged; and somehow I never managed to summon up enough courage to ask him. On one or two occasions I crept along the passage which separated living room from laboratory, and each time I heard queer, tittering noises and something like a humorless cachinnation — a sound as remote from laughter as a hyena's cackle. A musty fishlike odor hung about the laboratory door. On the last of these occasions I had barely retraced my steps to the seclusion of Jim's library when I heard him make a hurried exit from the laboratory, and I fancied that something wet and soggy hurled its mass against the hastily-locked door.

Jim looked pale and shaken, but his manner forbade any premature questioning. Shortly

after that episode, the tennis season came to an end; and when I next paid a visit to the block of flats where Jim lived, I found that his flat was empty and to let. Not a trace remained of his furniture and books, and the room which had constituted his laboratory was empty and forlorn looking. Nothing was left but the wallpaper, which was of a misty and indeterminate pattern. I thought that a fishy odor lingered on the air, but the housekeeper made no reference beyond a guarded statement to the effect that Mr. Lestrangle was a nice gentleman, but strange in his habits.

No address had been left, the housekeeper explained, and he wanted to know what to do with certain letters that had arrived for Jim from abroad. I suggested that he should forward them to the Secretary of the Tennis Club to hold, assuming that Jim would probably turn up there sooner or later.

I was brought back to the present abruptly as Jim nudged my elbow urgently. I glanced at his face. He was looking fixedly at a fellow member who was seated a few yards away in a deck chair, and reading a paper.

"Do you see it?" he breathed. His breath came short and fast. I gazed bewilderedly in the direction indicated. I shook my head.

"What do you mean, exactly?"

"There!" Jim pointed as unobtrusively as possible. "There — in the folds of his jacket." I looked again, but could see nothing. I shook my head again.

"No. I can't see anything!" The member moved, perhaps disturbed unconsciously by our concentrated attention, and the motion straighten out the creases.

"It's gone!" Jim sighed relievedly. "Sorry, old man — I did not mean to alarm you. But my nerves have been rather strained lately."

I laughed. "No need to apologize!"

"I'm living in this neighborhood now," Jim said. "I left the flat at Berners Street because — well, because of certain developments which made my departure expedient. You — you already know of my . . . unusual . . . interests, although I never told you anything of the experiments I conducted in the old laboratory."

Jim paused to delve feverishly into a pocket book. He scribbled a note, and handed it to me.

"Here is my new address. Come round and see me when you have a few minutes to spare."

I MET CARSTAIRS, the Secretary of Wensley Club, on my way home. He lives not far from me, and was on his way

to the Courts. I asked whether he had received Lestrangle's letters from the Berners Street apartment.

"Sure thing," Carstairs replied, "and a most peculiar enclosure from Jones, the housekeeper, too!"

He searched among some papers he took from an inside pocket. "Ah — here it is!"

He read extracts from a long rambling letter. "Um . . . um . . . oh, yes! He says that the flat has now been re-let to a young couple. They don't seem to be able to settle down. He seems to think it's because of something Lestrangle left behind, or did — and judging by the general tone of the letter, he blames *me* for it!"

Carstairs thrust the letter back into his pocket irritably. "Can't see what it's got to do with me, anyway. I haven't seen the fellow for months, and can't say that I feel I want to. He . . ."

He launched into a rambling criticism which I cut short.

"I have just met Lestrangle at the Club. I'll call round for those letters after tea, if you don't mind, and take them along with me when I visit his new place."

That evening it occurred to me to go along to Berners Street to see what I could learn from the housekeeper. His remarks about the new tenants had intrigued me.

I took the lift to the fourth floor, and was lucky to find Jones alone, his wife having gone to visit a friend. I mentioned that I knew of the contents of his letter to Carstairs, and frankly admitted that I was interested by his remarks concerning the new tenants.

Jones expressed alarm. "I didn't mean it to get around, sir! If other tenants get to know, there'll be the dickens to pay with my bosses . . ."

I assured him that the matter would go no further, so far as I was concerned.

"Did these new tenants make a formal complaint to you, then?" I asked.

The housekeeper shook his head. "No, sir. Nothing like that. But Mrs. Dixon — that's the wife, you know — she told me that there was something queer about one of the rooms. She said . . ."

He hesitated, and looked uncomfortable.

"Go on," I urged.

"She said," continued Jones, "that both she and her husband felt that the room was looking at them all the time."

"Looking at . . .?" My face must have expressed my incredulity, for the housekeeper reiterated his statement.

"Looking at 'em, sir." He nodded vigorously. "That's what she said, but when I asked her what she meant, she said it was difficult to explain."

"Do you think you could introduce me to this married couple?"

"Dunno, sir. I'd rather not, if you don't mind. The owners wouldn't like it. But if I might suggest a way — why not call on them yourself, and make out you didn't know Mr. Lestrangle had gone? See what I mean?"

"THIS WAS THE room Lestrangle used for his laboratory!" I explained.

Mr. Dixon knocked out his pipe in the hearth, and looked across at his wife, who was putting away a tablecloth in a sideboard drawer.

"Hear what Mr. Travers says, Joan? This room was used for experiments . . ." He broke off short, and looked keenly at me through his spectacles.

"What sort of experiments were they, sir? I don't want to appear prying, but since my wife and I have lived here, we have both had the oddest experiences . . ."

I shrugged. "I don't know," I replied quite truthfully, "but Mr. Lestrangle was secretive in his affairs. You say he has left no address. Well, I shall do my best to find him, of course. If you would care to confide your trouble to me, I will approach him on the matter. Perhaps he left for the same reason."

Mr. Dixon nodded thoughtfully. "It's possible."

His eyes strayed about the

room as he spoke, and I was reminded of something I couldn't quite bring to mind at the moment. His wife busied herself with the used teathings, and presently wheeled them from the room on a trolley.

"It's the wife I'm worried about most," he ventured. "You see, *she's* at home all day, and she's always in and out of this room. The movements are beginning to get on her nerves — and mine, too, to a lesser degree."

He paused, and looked at me unceratinly. "But perhaps you think we are both neurotics?"

I smiled, reassuringly. "Not at all. But you haven't told me what is the matter yet. How can I arrive at any conclusion until you do? What are these 'movements' you speak about?"

Dixon's eyes darted about the room ceaselessly. "Do you mean to say you have noticed *nothing*?"

I SHOOK MY head. "I can't say I have. The furniture's your own isn't it? And the last time this room it was empty . . ." I coughed slowly to conceal my mistake. I was not supposed to know of Lestrangle's departure. ". . . the room was full of workbenches and such things! The only distinctive feature of the room then was a fishlike odor, but that might have been my imagination."

"We, too, have smelled just

that," said Dixon gravely, "so it must be real. But it's — er — the manifestations usually coincide with another peculiarity . . ."

"I think I know what you mean now," I interjected. My mind pictured the room as I had last seen it — empty and forlorn. A musty fishlike odor had thrust itself upon my olfactory senses. The indefinitely-patterned wallpaper had seemed for a second or so to waver indistinctly . . .

"It's something to do with the wallpaper," Dixon declared. His eyes had never ceased their searching vigilance. "But when you turn away, something appears to move just outside the range of your vision. At first Joan and I used to think it was a kind of optical delusion, like you see in the Sunday newspapers sometimes. You know — parallel lines which do not look parallel because they are drawn on other lines set at differing angles to them.

"But we soon found that there was more to it than an optical illusion. At times the whole surface of the wallpaper will appear to be in unceasing activity, *except* the particular portion at which one happens to be looking directly."

Dixon thrust his hands deeply into the pockets of his smoking jacket.

"It is at those times that my wife and I become aware of that fishy smell, and at the

same time, there is an indefinable impression of added perspective — as though that wall-paper was really nothing more than a curtain, which might be close something . . . horrible . . .”

Dixon shuddered. His forehead shone wetly in the glare of the electric light. I ran a finger along the surface of the wallpaper. It felt damp, and oddly repulsive; I drew my hand away quickly.

“Are you aware of this ‘movement’ now?” I asked, quietly. I had picked up my hat, and was preparing to leave.

Dixon nodded. “Yes — it is going on continually.”

“Is it worse now than when you first occupied this flat?”

“Undoubtedly. Much worse!” There was unmistakable apprehension in Dixon’s eyes. “If you succeed in finding Mr. Lestranger, please ask him what is the matter with this room? We don’t want to give up the flat . . .”

LESTRANGE listened with white face to my account of my visit to his late flat.

“These Dixon people must be sensitives,” he murmured thoughtfully. “I never dreamed there might be danger of contagion. For their own sakes they must leave there immediately. I will . . .”

“Is it something to do with the wallpaper, then?” I interrupted. “Because if so, surely the best way would be to strip

the walls, or distemper over the surface.”

Jim shook his head, dispiritedly. “No. You don’t understand. The wallpaper is only a symptom of the real trouble. Do you think I would have left there had I been able to get the paper off, or cover it in some way?”

He shuddered. “I *tried* — time and time again — but *they* prevented me. Each time I attempted to scrape the walls, some inner compulsion seemed to bind my will, and render me helpless . . .”

He glanced round his sitting room. I noticed that it was very sparsely furnished, and there was an almost complete absence of cloth material of any kind. The walls were distempered pale blue as far as the picture rail. There was not even a colored border to offset the plainness.

Jim noticed the direction of my gaze, and smiled at me wanly. “Poor Alvin! You must be thinking that I’m off my head. This austerity of my surroundings is entirely necessary until I can find a way to close the Gate permanently. But I certainly owe you an explanation, after your long indulgence of my many faults.”

His gray eyes twinkled. “The Club people didn’t know what to make of me, did they? I can’t blame them entirely, because anything beyond what the aver-

age person considers as natural, is bound to be regarded with suspicion and even fear.

"You know that my interests lie in the region of the occult, and our many talks have shown you that not all of the alleged phenomena are imaginary or fraudulent. You may have wondered why I did not tell you about the experiments upon which I was engaged — but you have my assurance that my only reason for not doing so was a realization that it might have become dangerous for you to be involved.

"Here there is not that danger — for *you*. In my new laboratory yonder . . ." he gestured at a door in the opposite corner of the sitting room . . . "I have installed apparatus which cancels out the — the — vibrations by means of which *They* come . . ."

He rose from his chair, went to the laboratory door and opened it. A low hum reached my ears. He nodded to himself, as though satisfied. He beckoned me across and switched on the light.

Like his sitting room, the laboratory was strictly utilitarian. There was a small table with a white enamelled top. On it was a notebook, and I noticed that the visible page was covered with my friend's crabbed handwriting. A fountain pen lay near by. In the center of the room was a long bench supporting

an apparatus like a cinema projector, and this was pointed towards one of the walls. So far as I could see, all four walls were whitewashed and completely unadorned.

Jim gestured towards the machine. "It is an infra-red projector, and although you cannot see the beam, it is there just the same. I have to keep that going all the time, otherwise *They* would keep on coming through."

I thought of the bizarre illustrations I had seen in some of Jim's books, and shuddered. The memory of a wet and soggy flopping sound disturbed my imagination. I heard again a ghastly titting.

"That accounts for the fishy smell, I suppose," I commented.

Jim looked at me sharply. "When did you smell that?"

"At your old flat, of course — before the new tenants moved in. It was for me hardly noticeable, but the Dixons have observed it too, rather more strongly."

A worried frown crinkled Jim's forehead. "I must do something about that. It *would* be my luck to have a couple of sensitives as my successors. If they had been ordinary people the effect would have worn off in time. If I can't persuade them to move at once, I shall have to cart all this stuff round there, and see what I can do. Anyway,

don't you worry. Leave it to me . . ."

HE LEANED forward and switched off the projector. A faint red glow died away. To my amazement I noticed that whereas the other three walls were undoubtedly whitewashed and unpapered, that upon which the ray had been directed was now papered with much the same queer wavy design as that on the walls of his old laboratory.

I glanced at Jim. His eyes were fixed on the papered wall, and I thought I could perceive traces of fear in them, as though they witnessed something which, for me, was not visible. I looked at the wallpaper intently. The indeterminate markings seemed to strain my eyesight, and I turned my head away.

Jim switched on the machine again. The wallpaper appeared to vanish. The hum seemed strangely comforting.

"Why don't you give up this experimenting?" I said suddenly. "I feel . . . it's dangerous somehow . . . that you are tampering with forces we are not able to control."

"Rubbish!" interrupted Jim. "That's the materialistic way of expressing the old superstition that certain knowledge is evil and that there were things we were not meant to know. . . Let's be logical. Suppose that

were true: then if God really ordained that we might not learn some things, we'd never be able to learn them. . . . No, what has happened is that I have discovered a new world. Perhaps its inhabitants *are* a trifle unpleasant. But what of it? Does that make the find any the less worthwhile? I tell you — this is the greatest discovery of all time!"

I saw it was useless to argue with him, and turned the conversation in another direction "Why do you say the Dixons must be 'sensitives'?"

Jim gestured at the mysterious wallpaper.

"Because otherwise they would not see *that* in apparent motion. If they do not leave their flat soon, they will perceive what *I* can see every time that projector is switched off — a living picture of another world — a dimension bordering on and so nearly coincident with ours that almost everyone has at one time or another, caught glimpses of its inhabitants."

Jim picked up the notebook which had been lying on the enamelled tabletop and ruffled its pages.

"See here — this is the sort of thing I mean."

I read several lines, and then shrugged exasperatedly. "Surely you don't expect me to believe that tripe, do you? It's on a par

with 'pictures in the fire'. Sheer imagination I call it."

Jim gave a strained smile. "And just what *is* imagination?" Without waiting for my reply, he continued: "At least, you might do the lady the courtesy of reading all she has to say. Here — let me read it to you."

Jim took the notebook, and read from it:

"Mrs. Trevelyan writes: 'I was ironing the clothes after washing-day and the clothes horse stood by the side of the fireplace, so that my family could sit and read. I had ironed a silk frock and started on another garment, when I felt compelled to stop and look look across at the clothes on the horse. To my amazement, I watched a face grow from the folds of the silk dress; my absorption was so complete that I failed to notice the family staring at me intently, until my son asked me what I was looking at so queerly. I pointed it out to him, and judging from the expression on his face, he saw it too. In quick succession the rest of the family witnessed what I had seen from the first. It was a face the like of which I never want to see again. It resembled the green grotesque visage and torso of a man growing on the lower limbs of a bull-frog; and its evil grimaces sent my family and myself screaming upstairs. . . .'"

JIM REPLACED the notebook on the tabletop, and looked at me in silence. I bore his scrutiny uneasily.

"Well . . . what does that prove? Even if her family did see this 'frog-man' creature — and that is not clearly stated — it merely shows that they were hypnotized into seeing what she *thought* she saw. It was a kind of mental contagion, I should say. A mere rearrangement of the clothes would have soon dissipated her mind-creation into thin air."

I spoke heatedly, for the whole idea seemed preposterous to me. But Jim looked extremely serious as he opened a bench drawer, and tossed in my direction what appeared to be an album.

"Take a look at some of those," he invited.

Perplexed, I flicked over a dozen pages; and, hardened as I am to gruesome scenes, the pictures therein made me feel squeamish. They were as bad, if not worse, as any I had glimpsed in Jim's occult volumes. I handed the volume back to Jim with a shudder.

"I apologize! I don't know how you obtained these photographs — but I can add two and two together as well as most people. I see you have a camera in the corner there, and any one of these pictured monstrosities might easily be the prototype of Mrs. Trevelyan's 'vision'".

Jim accepted my concession with a friendly nod.

"Actually they are infra-red photographs of that wallpaper facing the projector, taken when the machine wasn't running. Normally, human eyes cannot perceive the 'light' used by the camera, which is beyond the range of the visible spectrum. That should also explain to you why these creatures cannot be seen by you when you look at the wallpaper."

"Yes — but . . ." I eyed Jim doubtfully. "But *you* can see these frogs . . . and other . . . monstrosities apparently; and so, to a certain degree, can Mr. and Mrs. Dixon. Why should I be an exception?"

"You are not an exception," replied Jim, returning the album to the bench drawer. "You represent the normal person, who reacts in much the same way as you do. The Dixons are sensitives, as I mentioned before — and so am I. But in my case, my sensitiveness has been artificially developed by the gradual extension of my visual and auditory faculties. So much so, in fact, that I see the denizens of this other dimension even when I'm out in the street, or at the Club. You remember . . .?"

I nodded soberly. "I remember!"

I faced Jim squarely. "Tell me — truthfully — is there any

real danger for you in these experiments?"

Jim laughed uneasily. "How can there be? It is simply a question of extension of my powers of sight and hearing, that is all. The sights and sounds are not exactly pleasant — indeed, rather terrifying. But . . ." He shrugged. "A doctor doesn't cease research because certain aspects of his work are unpleasing. He would not be doing his duty if he did. I consider myself to be placed in much the same position."

JIM WAS concealing something from me; I knew that! As I walked slowly homewards I milled over his queer theories and alleged photographic proofs. My mind found great difficulty in admitting the force of his arguments, once I was away from his persuasive presence.

Here was I, an Insurance Broker, gravely accepting the possibility that those pictured horrors were not paper-mache models made up in some cinematographic studio, but *real*. Photos of creatures whose existence, if real, was in the nature of a blasphemy, an affront to the Ruler of any sane universe. In an attempt to break down the array of formidable facts with which Jim had assailed me, I had asked him how ordinary wallpaper could pos-

sibly be a Gate to another dimension.

"Ordinary *paper* enough," Jim had conceded, "but the color and design are what really matter. You see, John, I got my big idea from a study of camouflage during the War. I learned then that color can alter the apparent *shape* of an object, and designs in patches of contrasting colors can so break up the shape of any object, such as a building or a battleship, that these objects become practically invisible against their background. Color can also make things apparently 'advance' or 'recede'. Objects printed in red, orange or yellow, appear to be nearer to the viewer than they really are. Blues, purples and greens are 'retiring' colors, and objects printed with them seem to stand back."

Jim had paused. I thought his gaze fell apprehensively on the ray-bathed wall.

"I fell to considering that Nature was an adept at camouflage long before the British Army introduced khaki in 1890. I pondered that queer lizard-like creature, the chameleon, whose coloring changes to match whatever surroundings it encounters. There's the tiger, whose stripes blend so perfectly with its jungle background that it is almost impossible for it to be seen. There's the polar

bear, the snow leopard, and many others.

"All these, I noticed, were instances of animals whose natural protective coloring tended to blend their shapes into their normal background. Was it also possible, I asked myself, that there were living creatures whose natural camouflage was so perfect that they would not be visible in *any* normal circumstances.

"I started to experiment with colored backgrounds, in the hope of arriving at a combination or pattern of colors which would show up, rather than conceal, the presence of such creatures if they existed. I collected scores of instances where people had had fleeting glimpses of faces, forms, and even buildings. Eventually I came to the conclusion that there was actually a world of living creatures so perfectly camouflaged, that the deception applied not only to visualization, but to auditory, olfactory, and tactile senses as well.

"To all intents and purposes this camouflaged world was another dimension, but in point of fact this was not so. It was really an inter-dimensional world; of the physical universe but not apprehensible *by* it. A really extraordinary state of affairs.

"However, I evolved the streaky-lined wallpaper which is now so familiar to you. You

will notice that it hurts your eyes to look at it, after a time. That is because the light reflected by the wallpaper is polarized in the direction of that other camouflaged world, and naturally your eyes feel it. But mine are accustomed to it — through long practice at viewing the sights of that plane of existence as it gradually swam into view for me. Presently, I became aware that the intelligent life of that dimension was becoming cognizant of *me*, which meant obviously that this was a two-way view.

"And then I began to hear! To hear sounds — scrunching sounds — so horrible and of such significance . . ."

Jim paused, shuddered, and then went on.

"I installed this machine to give my heightened senses a rest. Only in this room can I have respite from the continual awareness of that other world . . ."

"Have you succeeded in establishing communication?"

Jim looked at me queerly, as though trying to estimate how much I knew. After a barely perceptible pause he replied, "No. They have a language of sorts, but my knowledge of philology is not yet sufficiently extensive to establish a common basis."

As I had left my friend's laboratory, on my way home, I thought over what he had said,

but felt very little comforted. Because the thought was tormenting me that I also must be becoming sensitive to the strange vibrations from that other plane of existence. How else explains that tittering noise I had heard as I shook hands, and the whisperings which ceased abruptly as Jim hastily closed the door behind me.

THE HOUSEKEEPER met me at the entrance to the pretentious block of flats in Berners Street. His face was white, and consternation showed in his eyes, but his words were ordinary enough.

"Glad you've been able to come, sir! I knew you were Mr. Lestranger's best friend, and when I telephoned Mr. Carstairs at the Wensley Club, he gave me your number . . ."

"Pleased he did," I said, as the lift whisked me up to the Dixon level. "How long has Mr. Lestranger been here?"

"I don't rightly know, sir. I wasn't around when he came, but his car has been parked out there for at least three hours."

I nodded, abstractedly. The lift doors clanged open, and the Dixons stood there to greet me, their faces expressing the same measure of consternation and superstitious awe which I had espied on Jones' face.

"Where is he?" I asked, quickly.

Dixon nodded at the door of

the sitting-room, as we entered the flat from the landing. I approached, and knocked loudly at the door. "Jim — it's me, Alvin! Let me in, will you?" "The door's locked," whispered Dixon. "I've sent Jones for the master-key."

I listened intently. There was dead silence within the room. "He hasn't answered for over an hour now," ventured Mrs. Dixon, "but every now and then there is a sound of movement inside, as though something heavy is slithering about on the floor. I — I'm afraid!" She turned abruptly towards her husband and buried her face in the lapel of his coat.

I applied an eye to the key-hole, but could see nothing. I straightened my back.

"Did Mr. Lestrangle bring any stuff — any apparatus — with him?"

Dixon nodded. "Yes — a machine like a ray-projector of some sort. Mounted on something like an outsize gramophone turntable."

"His neutralizer!" I exclaimed. "That's a gadget for . . . making that wallpaper harmless."

Mrs. Dixon shrank back against her husband.

"It is dangerous, then? I knew it! Every time I watched that hateful paper leering at me as though it was alive, I felt it was evil. And when it wouldn't come away from the wall . . ."

I interrupted. "Did Mr. Lestrangle ask to be left alone?"

Dixon said, "Yes. He introduced himself to us as the former tenant, and said he'd heard about our trouble and that we were what he called 'sensitives'. Said also that he couldn't promise anything, but he would have a shot at clearing the room, and . . ."

I held up my hand to enjoin silence.

"Listen!" In the pause which ensued, I heard a voice calling. It sounded weak and faint, as though coming from an infinite distance: "It's got me! It's got me!"

I rattled the door-handle frantically and futilely. "Quick, sir! Here's the key!" Jones thrust it into my hand. I listened for a second before I sprang the lock. The commotion inside the room had died down as quickly as it had begun, except for an odd snuffling sound.

I PUSHED THE door wide open, a sick feeling at the pit of my stomach. An appalling fetor swept out at me, making me retch. I glanced quickly round the room. There was no sign of Jim.

The machine I had seen at his flat was now installed in the center of the room. The flex which had connected it to a wall socket had been roughly wrenched loose. Sheets of paper from a writing pad lay

scattered on the carpet. They were covered with crabbed handwriting.

But what held my gaze was the bizarre spectacle which confronted me on the opposite wall. Each wall, but more particularly the one confronting me, was moving; not in the sense of motion along a plane surface, but movement *within itself*; like the flickering of an ancient film. And the similarity was sustained in some measure by the fact that within, and apparently part of the flickering process, there loomed a face. Distorted and out of focus as it was, indistinct as an image reflected in water, it was yet

recognizable. The mouth was open as though mouthing syllables, but I could hear nothing. The body vaguely attached to the face seemed to stretch away from me into some unimaginable perspective contained somehow within the texture of the wall itself.

And even as I watched, the face retreated into that impossible distance, as though dragged by some irresistible suction. I shall never forget the look of mingled entreaty, terror, and despair on that visage — because the distorted features which loomed forth momentarily from that haunted wallpaper were those of my friend and confidante, Jim Lestrangle!



The Repairer Of Reputations

by Robert W. Chambers

In "The Yellow Sign" (MOH, August 1963) a reference is made by the narrator to "the awful tragedy of young Castaigne, whom I knew"; and it is this recollection which has thus far prevented the narrator from reading the dreadful "King In Yellow." "The King In Yellow" is the title both of a collection of short stories by Mr. Chambers, first published in 1895 and a frightful play bearing that title—a play which seems innocent enough for its first act, but which draws the reader inexorably on to the point where he is enmeshed in horror that has a permanent affect upon him, and relates in some way to an actual being known as "The King In Yellow." H. P. Lovecraft, and many other of the best authors of weird fiction have both praised and been inspired by this work. Only the first three stories in the book actually relate to the title of the volume, and the second and third have been reprinted fairly often, though not so recently as to warrant our not offering them to today's generation of aficionados. The first story, which we offer here, has usually been by-passed because it is not so clearly of the Lovecraft type of horror as the other two, and in fact is quite a different sort of horror tale; but nonetheless gripping. The opening could certainly pass for science fiction of the last century, as it depicts the United States as of a quarter century in the future—1920, to be exact. This is amusing in part, but there are disturbing elements which made us feel that the opening pages ought not to be abridged. It is so easy, with hindsight, to call this or that author prophetic; whether Mr. Chambers can qualify we leave up to you—but there are certainly premonitions here of some of the horrors which took place in the twentieth century, and in its way, this tale symbolizes many of them.

"Ne railons pas les fous; leur folie dure plus longtemps que la notre. . . . Voila toute la difference."

TOWARDS THE END of the year 1920 the government of the United States had practically completed the program adopted during the last months of President Wintrop's administration. The country was apparently tranquil. Everybody knows how the Tariff and Labor questions were settled. The war with Germany, incident on that country's seizure of the Samoan Islands, had left no visible scars upon the republic, and the temporary occupation of Norfolk by the invading army had been forgotten in the joy over repeated naval victories and the subsequent ridiculous plight of General Von Gartenlaube's forces in the State of New Jersey. The Cuban and Hawaiian investments had paid one hundred per cent, and the territory of Samoa was well worth its cost as a coaling station. The country was in a superb state of defence. Every coast city had been well supplied with land fortifications; the army, under the parental eye of the general staff, organized according to the Prussian system, had been increased to three hundred thousand men, with a territorial reserve of a million; and six magnificent squadrons of cruisers and battleships patrolled the six sta-

tions of the navigable seas, leaving a steam reserve amply fitted to control home waters.

The gentlemen from the West had at last been constrained to acknowledge that a college for the training of diplomats was as necessary as law schools are for the training of barristers; consequently we were no longer represented abroad by incompetent patriots. The nation was prosperous. Chicago, for a moment paralyzed after a second great fire, had risen from its ruins, white and imperial, and more beautiful than the white city which had been built for its plaything in 1893. Everywhere good architecture was replacing bad, and even in New York a sudden craving for decency had swept away a great portion of the existing horrors. Streets had been widened, properly paved, and lighted, trees had been planted, squares laid out, elevated structures demolished, and underground roads built to replace them. The new government buildings and barracks were fine bits of architecture, and the long system of stone quays which completely surrounded the island had been turned into parks, which proved a godsend to the population.

The subsidizing of the state theater and state opera brought its own reward. The United States National Academy of Design was much like European institutions of the same kind.

Nobody envied the Secretary of Fine Arts either his cabinet position or his portfolio. The Secretary of Forestry and Game Preservation had a much easier time, thanks to the new system of National Mounted Police. We had profited well by the latest treaties with France and England; the exclusion of foreign-born Jews as a measure of national self-preservation, the settlement of the new independent Negro state of Suanee, the checking of immigration, the new laws concerning naturalization, and the gradual centralization of power in the executive all contributed to national calm and prosperity.

When the government solved the Indian problem and squadrons of Indian cavalry scouts in native costume were substituted for the pitiable organizations tacked on to the tail of skeletonized regiments by a former Secretary of War, the nation drew a long sigh of relief. When, after the colossal Congress of Religions, bigotry and intolerance were laid in their graves, and kindness and charity began to draw warring sects together, many thought the millennium had arrived, at least in the new world, which, after all, is a world by itself.

But self-preservation is the first law, and the United States had to look on in helpless sorrow as Germany, Italy, Spain, and Belgium writhed in the

throes of anarchy, while Russia, watching from the Caucasus, stooped and bound them one by one.

IN THE CITY of New York the summer of 1910 was signalized by the dismantling of the Elevated Railroads. The summer of 1911 will live in the memories of New York people for many a cycle; the Dodge statue was removed in that year. In the following winter began that agitation for the repeal of the laws prohibiting suicide, which bore its final fruit in the month of April, 1920, when the first Governmental Lethal Chamber was opened on Washington Square.

I had walked down that day from Dr. Archer's house on Madison Avenue, where I had been as a mere formality. Ever since that fall from my horse, four years before, I had been troubled at times with pains in the back of my head and neck, but now for months they had been absent, and the doctor sent me away that day saying there was nothing more to be cured in me. It was hardly worth his fee to be told that; I knew it myself. Still I did not grudge him the money. What I minded was the mistake which he made at first. When they picked me up from the pavement where I lay unconscious, and somebody had mercifully sent a bullet through my horse's

head, I was carried to Dr. Archer, and he, pronouncing my brain affected, placed me in his private asylum, where I was obliged to endure treatment for insanity. At last he decided that I was well, and I, knowing that my mind had always been as sound as his, if not sounder, "paid my tuition," as he jokingly called it, and left. I told him, smiling, that I would get even with him for his mistake, and he laughed heartily, and asked me to call once in a while. I did so, hoping for a chance to even up accounts, but he gave me none, and I told him I would wait.

The fall from my horse had fortunately left no evil results; on the contrary, it had changed my whole character for the better. From a lazy young man about town, I had become active, energetic, temperate, and, above all — oh, above all else — ambitious. There was only one thing which troubled me: I laughed at my own uneasiness, and yet it troubled me.

During my convalescence I had bought and read for the first time "The King in Yellow." I remember after finishing the first act that it occurred to me that I had better stop. I started up and flung the book into the fireplace; the volume struck the barred grate and fell open on the hearth in the firelight. If I had not caught a glimpse of the opening words in the second

act I should never have finished it, but as I stooped to pick it up my eyes became riveted to the open page, and with a cry of terror, or perhaps it was of joy so poignant that I suffered in every nerve, I snatched the thing from the hearth and crept shaking to my bedroom, where I read it and reread it, and wept and laughed and trembled with a horror which at times assails me yet.

This is the thing that troubles me, for I cannot forget Carcosa, where black stars hang in the heavens, where the shadows of men's thoughts lengthen in the afternoon, when the twin suns sink into the Lake of Hali, and my mind will bear forever the memory of the Pallid Mask. I pray God will curse the writer, as the writer has cursed the world with this beautiful, stupendous creation, terrible in its simplicity, irresistible in its truth — a world which now trembles before the King in Yellow. When the French government seized the translated copies which had just arrived in Paris, London, of course, became eager to read it. It is well known how the book spread like an infectious disease, from city to city, from continent to continent, barred out here, confiscated there, denounced by press and pulpit, censured even by the most advanced of literary anarchists. No definite principles had been violated in those

wicked pages, no doctrine promulgated, no convictions outraged. It could not be judged by any standard, yet, although it was acknowledged that the supreme note of art had been struck in "The King in Yellow," all felt that human nature could not bear the strain nor thrive in words in which the essence of purest poison lurked. The very banality and innocence of the first act only allowed the blow to fall afterwards with more awful effect.

IT WAS, I remember, the 13th day of April, 1920, that the first Government Lethal Chamber was established on the south side of Washington Square, between Wooster Street and South Fifth Avenue. The block, which had formerly consisted of a lot of shabby old buildings, used as cafes and restaurants for foreigners, had been acquired by the government in the winter of 1913. The French and Italian cafes and restaurants were torn down; the whole block was enclosed by a gilded iron railing, and converted into a lovely garden, with lawns, flowers, and fountains. In the center of the garden stood a small, white building, severely classical in architecture, and surrounded by thickets of flowers. Six Ionic columns supported the roof, and the single door was of bronze. A splendid marble group of "The

Fates" stood before the door, the work of a young American sculptor, Boris Yvain, who had died in Paris when only twenty-three years old.

The inauguration ceremonies were in progress as I crossed University Place and entered the square. I threaded my way through the silent throng of spectators but was stopped at Fourth Street by a cordon of police. A regiment of United States Lancers were drawn up in a hollow square around the Lethal Chamber. On a raised tribune facing Washington Park stood the Governor of New York, and behind him were grouped the Mayor of Greater New York, the Inspector-General of Police, the commandant of the State troops, Colonel Livingston (military aid to the President of the United States), General Blount (commanding at Governor's Island), Major-General Hamilton (commanding the garrison of Greater New York), Admiral Buffby (of the fleet in the North River), Surgeon-General Lanceford, the staff of the National Free Hospital, Senators Wyse and Franklin, of New York and the Commissioner of Public Works. The tribune was surrounded by a squadron of hussars of the National Guard.

The Governor was finishing his reply to the short speech of the Surgeon-General. I heard

him say: "The laws prohibiting suicide and providing punishment for any attempt at self-destruction have been repealed. The government has seen fit to acknowledge the right of man to end an existence which may have become intolerable to him, through physical suffering or mental despair. It is believed that the community will be benefited by the removal of such people from their midst. Since the passage of this law, the number of suicides in the United States has not increased. Now that the government has determined to establish a Lethal Chamber in every city, town, and village in the country, it remains to be seen whether or not that class of human creatures from whose desponding ranks new victims of self-destruction fall daily will accept the relief thus provided."

He paused, and turned to the white Lethal Chamber. The silence in the street was absolute. "There a painless death awaits him who can no longer bear the sorrows of this life. If death is welcome, let him seek it there." Then, quickly turning to the military aid of the President's household, he said, "I declare the Lethal Chamber open"; and again facing the vast crowd, he cried, in a clear voice: "Citizens of New York and of the United States of America, through me the government declares the Lethal Chamber to be open."

THE SOLEMN HUSH was broken by a sharp cry of command, the squadron of hussars filed after the Governor's carriage, the lancers wheeled and formed along Fifth Avenue to wait for the commandant of the garrison, and the mounted police followed them. I left the crowd to gape and stare at the white marble death-chamber, and, crossing South Fifth Avenue, walked along the western side of that thoroughfare to Bleeker Street. Then I turned to the right and stopped before a dingy shop which bore the sign,

HAWBERK, ARMORER.

I glanced in at the doorway and saw Hawberk busy in his little shop at the end of the hall. He looked up, and, catching sight of me, cried, in his deep, hearty voice, "Come in, Mr. Castaigne!"

Constance, his daughter, rose to meet me as I crossed the threshold, and held out her pretty hand, but I saw the blush of disappointment on her cheeks, and knew that it was another Castaigne she had expected, my cousin Louis. I smiled at her confusion and complimented her on the banner which she was embroidering from a colored plate. Old Hawberk sat riveting the worn greaves of some ancient suit of armor, and the ting! ting! ting!

of his little hammer sounded pleasantly in the quaint shop. Presently he dropped his hammer and fussed about for a moment with a tiny wrench.

The soft clash of the mail sent a thrill of pleasure through me. I loved to hear the music of steel brushing against steel, the mellow shock of the mallet on thigh-pieces, and the jingle of chain armor. That was the only reason I went to see Hawberk. He had never interested me personally, nor did Constance, except for the fact of her being in love with Louis. This did occupy my attention, and sometimes even kept me awake at night. But I knew in my heart that all would come right, and that I should arrange their future as I expected to arrange that of my kind doctor, John Archer. However, I should never have troubled myself about visiting them just then had it not been, as I say, that the music of the tinkling hammer had for me this strong fascination. I would sit for hours listening and listening, and when a stray sunbeam struck the inlaid steel, the sensation it gave me was almost too keen to endure. My eyes would become fixed, dilating with a pleasure that stretched every nerve almost to breaking, until some movement of the old armorer cut off the ray of sunlight, then, still thrilling secretly, I leaned

back and listened again to the sound of the polishing rag — swish! swish! — rubbing rust from the rivets.

Constance worked with the embroidery over her knees, now and then pausing to examine more closely the pattern in the colored plate from the Metropolitan Museum.

"Who is this for?" I asked.

HAWBERK explained that in addition to the treasures of armor in the Metropolitan Museum, of which he had been appointed armorer, he also had charge of several collections belonging to rich amateurs. This was the missing greave of a famous suit which a client of his had traced to a little shop in Paris on the Quai d'Orsay. He, Hawberk, had negotiated for and secured the greave, and now the suit was complete. He laid down his hammer and read me the history of the suit, traced since 1450 from owner to owner until it was acquired by Thomas Stainbridge. When his superb collection was sold, this client of Hawberk's bought the suit, and since then the search for the missing greave had been pushed until it was, almost by accident, located in Paris.

"Did you continue the search so persistently without any certainty of the greave being still in existence?" I demanded.

"Of course," he replied, coolly.

Then for the first time I took a personal interest in Hawberk.

"It was worth something to you," I ventured.

"No," he replied, laughing, "my pleasure in finding it was my reward."

"Have you no ambition, to be rich?" I asked, smiling.

"My one ambition is to be the best armorer in the world," he answered, gravely.

Constance asked me if I had seen the ceremonies at the Lethal Chamber. She herself had noticed cavalry passing up Broadway that morning, and had wished to see the inauguration, but her father wanted the banner finished, and she had stayed at his request.

"Did you see your cousin, Mr. Castaigne, there?" she asked, with the slightest tremor of her soft eyelashes.

"No," I replied, carelessly. "Louis' regiment is maneuvering out in Westchester County." I rose and picked up my hat and cane.

"Are you going upstairs to see the lunatic again?" laughed old Hawberk.

If Hawberk knew how I loathe that word "lunatic," he would never use it in my presence. It rouses certain feelings within me which I do not care to explain. However, I answered him quietly. "I think I shall drop in and see Mr. Wilde for a moment or two."

"Poor fellow," said Constance,

with a shake of her head, "it must be hard to live alone year after year, poor, crippled, and almost demented. It is very good of you, Mr. Castaigne, to visit him as often as you do."

"I think he is vicious," observed Hawberk, beginning again with his hammer.

I listened to the golden tinkle on the greave-plates; when he had finished I replied, "No, he is not vicious, nor is he in the least demented. His mind is a wonder chamber, from which he can extract treasures that you and I would give years of our lives to acquire."

Hawberk laughed.

I continued, a little impatiently: "He knows history as no one else could know it. Nothing, however trivial, escapes his search, and his memory is so absolute, so precise in details, that were it known in New York that such a man existed the people could not honor him enough."

"Nonsense!" muttered Hawberk, searching on the floor for a fallen rivet.

"Is it nonsense," I asked, managing to suppress what I felt — "is it nonsense when he says that the tassets and cuissards of the enamelled suit of armor commonly known as the 'Prince's Emblazoned' can be found among a mass of rusty theatrical properties, broken stoves, and rag-picker's refuse in a garret in Pell Street?"

Hawberk's hammer fell to the ground, but he picked it up and asked, with a great deal of calm, now I knew that the tassels and left cuissard were missing from the "Prince's Emblazoned."

"I did not know until Mr. Wilde mentioned it to me the other day. He said they were in the garret of 998 Pell Street.

"Nonsense!" he cried; but I noticed his hand trembling under his leathern apron.

"Is this nonsense, too?" I asked, pleasantly. "Is it nonsense when Mr. Wilde continually speaks of you as the Marquis of Avonshire, and of Miss Constance . . ."

I did not finish for Constance had started to her feet with terror written on every feature. Hawberk looked at me and slowly smoothed his leathern apron. "That is impossible," he observed. "Mr. Wilde may know a great many things . . ."

"About armor, for instance, and the 'Prince's Emblazoned,'" I interposed, smiling.

"Yes," he continued, slowly, "about armor also — maybe — but he is wrong in regard to the Marquis of Avonshire, who, as you know, killed his wife's trader years ago, and went to Australia, where he did not long survive his wife."

"Mr. Wilde is wrong," murmured Constance. Her lips were blanched, but her voice was sweet and calm.

"Let us agree, if you please, that in this one circumstance Mr. Wilde is wrong," I said.

II

I CLIMBED THE three dilapidated flights of stairs which I had so often climbed before, and knocked at a small door at the end of the corridor. Mr. Wilde opened the door and I walked in.

When he had double-locked the door and pushed a heavy chest against it, he came and sat down beside me, peering up into my face with his little, light-colored eyes. Half a dozen new scratches covered his nose and cheeks, and the silver wires which supported his artificial ears had become displaced. I thought I had never seen him so hideously fascinating. He had no ears. The artificial ones, which now stood out at an angle from the fine wire, were his one weakness. They were made of wax and painted a shell pink; but the rest of his face was yellow. He might better have revelled in the luxury of some artificial fingers for his left hand, which was absolutely fingerless, but it seemed to cause him no inconvenience, and he was satisfied with his wax ears. He was very small, scarcely higher than a child of ten, but his arms were magnificently developed, and his thighs as thick as any athlete's. Still, the most remarka-

ble thing about Mr. Wilde was that a man of his marvelous intelligence and knowledge should have such a head. It was flat and pointed, like the heads of many of those unfortunates whom people imprison in asylums for the weak-minded. Many called him insane, but I knew him to be as sane as I was.

I do not deny that he was eccentric; the mania he had for keeping that cat and teasing her until she flew at his face like a demon was certainly eccentric. I never could understand why he kept the creature, nor what pleasure he found in shutting himself up in his room with the surly, vicious beast. I remember once glancing up from the manuscript I was studying by the light of some tallow dips and seeing Mr. Wilde squatting motionless on his high chair, his eyes fairly blazing with excitement, while the cat, which had risen from her place before the stove, came creeping across the floor right at him. Before I could move she flattened her belly to the ground, crouched, trembled, and sprang into his face. Howling and foaming, they rolled over and over on the floor, scratching and clawing, until the cat screamed and fled under the cabinet, and Mr. Wilde turned over on his back, his limbs contracting and curling up like the legs of a drying spider. He *was* eccentric.

Mr. Wilde had climbed into his high chair, and after studying my face, picked up a dog's eared ledger and opened it.

"Henry B. Matthews," he read, "bookkeeper with Whysot Whysot & Company, dealers in church ornaments. Called April 3d. Reputation damaged on the racetrack. Known as a welcher. Reputation to be repaired by August 1st. Retainer, Five Dollars." He turned the page and ran his fingerless knuckles down the closely written columns.

"P. Greer Dusenberry, Minister of the Gospel, Fairbeach, New Jersey. Reputation damaged in the Bowery. To be repaired as soon as possible. Retainer, \$100."

He coughed and added, "Called, April 6th."

"Then you are not in need of money, Mr. Wilde," I inquired.

"Listen" — he coughed again. "Mrs. C. Hamilton Chester, of Chester Park, New York City called April 7th. Reputation damaged at Dieppe, France. To be repaired by October 1st. Retainer, \$500.

"Note. — C. Hamilton Chester, Captain U.S.S. *Avalanche*, ordered home from South Sea Squadron October 1st."

"Well," I said, "the profession of a Repairer of Reputations is lucrative."

HIS COLORLESS eyes sought mine. "I only wanted to demonstrate that I was correct.

You said it was impossible to succeed as a Repairer of Reputations; that even if I did succeed in certain cases, it would cost me more than I would gain by it. Today I have five hundred men in my employ, who are poorly paid, but who pursue the work with an enthusiasm which possibly may be born of fear. These men enter every shade and grade of society; some even are pillars of the most exclusive social temples; others are the prop and pride of the financial world; still others hold undisputed sway among the 'Fancy and the Talent.' I choose them at my leisure from those who reply to my advertisements. It is easy enough — they are all cowards. I could treble the number in twenty days if I wished. So, you see, those who have in their keeping the reputations of their fellow-citizens, I have in my pay."

"They may turn on you," I suggested.

He rubbed his thumb over his cropped ears and adjusted the wax substitutes. "I think not," he murmured, thoughtfully, "I seldom have to apply the whip, and then only once. Besides, they like their wages."

"How do you apply the whip?" I demanded.

His face for a moment was awful to look upon. His eyes sparkled to a pair of green sparks.

"I invite them to come and have a little chat with me," he said, in a soft voice.

A knock at the door interrupted him, and his face resumed its amiable expression.

"Who is it?" he inquired.

"Mr. Steylette," was the answer.

"Come tomorrow," replied Mr. Wilde.

"Impossible," began the other; but was silenced by a sort of bark from Mr. Wilde.

"Come tomorrow," he repeated.

We heard somebody move away from the door and turn the corner by the stairway.

"Who is that?" I asked.

"Arnold Steylette, owner and editor-in-chief of the great New York daily."

He drummed on the ledger with his fingerless hand, adding, "I pay him very badly, but he thinks it a good bargain."

"Arnold Steylette!" I repeated, amazed.

"Yes," said Mr. Wilde, with a self-satisfied cough.

The cat, which had entered the room as he spoke, hesitated, looked up at him, and snarled. He climbed down from the chair, and, squatting on the floor, took the creature into his arms and caressed her. The cat ceased snarling and presently began a loud purring, which seemed to increase in timbre as he stroked her.

"Where are the notes?" I

asked. He pointed to the table, and for the hundredth time I picked up the bundle of manuscript entitled

THE IMPERIAL DYNASTY OF
AMERICA

One by one I studied the well-worn pages, worn only by my own handling, and, although I knew all by heart, from the beginning, "When from Carcosa, the Hyades, Hastur, and Aldebaran" to "Castaigne, Louis de Calvados, born December 19, 1887," I read it with an eager, rapt attention, pausing to repeat parts of it aloud, and dwelling especially on "Hildred de Calvados, only son of Hildred Castaigne and Edythe Landes Castaigne, first in succession," etc., etc.

WHEN I FINISHED, Mr. Wilde nodded and coughed.

"Speaking of your legitimate ambition," he said, "how do Constance and Louis get along?"

"She loves him," I replied simply.

The cat on his knee suddenly turned and struck at his eyes, and he flung her off and climbed on to the chair opposite me.

"And Dr. Archer? But that's a matter you can settle any time you wish," he added.

"Yes," I replied, "Dr. Archer can wait, but it is time I saw my cousin Louis."

"It is time," he repeated. Then he took another ledger from the table and ran over the leaves rapidly.

"We are now in communication with ten thousand men," he muttered. "We can count on one hundred thousand within the first twenty-eight hours, and in forty-eight hours the State will rise *en masse*. The country follows the State, and the portion that will not, I mean California and the Northwest, might better never have been inhabited. I shall not send them the Yellow Sign."

The blood rushed to my head, but I only answered, "A new broom sweeps clean."

"The ambition of Caesar and of Napoleon pales before that which could not rest until it had seized the minds of men and controlled even their unborn thoughts," said Mr. Wilde.

"You are speaking of the King in Yellow," I groaned, with a shudder.

"He is a king whom emperors have served."

"I am content to serve him," I replied.

Mr. Wilde sat rubbing his ears with his crippled hand. "Perhaps Constance does not love him," he suggested.

I started to reply, but a sudden burst of military music from the street below drowned my voice. The Twentieth Dragoon Regiment, formerly in garrison at Mount St. Vincent, was

returning from the maneuvers in Westchester County to its new barracks on East Washington Square. It was my cousin's regiment. They were a fine lot of fellows, in their pale-blue, tight-fitting jackets, jaunty busbies, and white riding-breeches, with the double yellow stripe, into which their limbs seemed moulded. Every other squadron was armed with lances, from the metal points of which fluttered yellow-and-white pennons. The band passed, playing the regimental march, then came the colonel and staff, the horses crowding and trampling, while their heads bobbed in unison, and the pennons fluttered from their lance points. The troopers, who rode with the beautiful English seat, looked brown as berries from their bloodless campaign among the farms of Westchester, and the music of their sabres against the stirrups, and the jingle of spurs and carbines was delightful to me.

I saw Louis riding with his squadron. He was as handsome an officer as I have ever seen. Mr. Wilde, who had mounted a chair by the window, saw him, too, but said nothing. Louis turned and looked straight at Hawberk's shop as he passed, and I could see the flush on his brown cheeks. I think Constance must have been at the window. When the last troopers had clattered by, and the last pennons vanished into South Fifth Ave-

nue, Mr. Wilde clambered out of his chair and dragged the chest away from the door.

"Yes," he said, "it is time that you saw your cousin Louis."

He unlocked the door and I picked up my hat and stick and stepped into the corridor. The stairs were dark. Groping about, I set my foot on something soft, which snarled and spit, and I aimed a murderous blow at the cat, but my cane shivered to splinters against the balustrade, and the beast scurried back into Mr. Wilde's room.

Passing Hawberk's door again, I saw him still at work on the armor, but I did not stop, and, stepping out into Bleecker Street, I followed it to Wooster, skirted the grounds of the Lethal Chamber, and, crossing Washington Park, went straight to my rooms in the Benedick. Here I lunched comfortably, read the *Herald* and the *Meteor*, and finally went to the steel safe in my bedroom and set the time combination. The three and three-quarter minutes which it is necessary to wait, while the time lock is opening, are to me golden moments. From the instant I set the combination to the moment when I grasp the knobs and swing back the solid steel doors, I live in an ecstasy of expectation. Those moments must be like moments passed in paradise. I know what I am to find at the end of the time limit. I know what the massive safe

holds secure for me, for me alone, and the exquisite pleasure of waiting is hardly enhanced when the safe opens and I lift, from its velvet crown, a diadem of purest gold, blazing with diamonds. I do this every day, and yet the joy of waiting and at last touching again the diadem only seems to increase as the days pass. It is a diadem fit for a king among kings, an emperor among emperors. The King in Yellow might scorn it, but it shall be worn by his royal servant.

I HELD IT IN my arms until the alarm on the safe rang harshly, and then tenderly, proudly I replaced it and shut the steel doors. I walked slowly back into my study, which faces Washington Square, and leaned on the window-sill. The afternoon sun poured into my windows, and a gentle breeze stirred the branches of the elms and maples in the park, now covered with buds and tender foliage. A flock of pigeons circled about the tower of the Memorial Church; sometimes alighting on the purple-tiled roof, sometimes wheeling downward to the lotus fountain in front of the marble arch. The gardeners were busy with the flower-beds around the fountain, and the freshly turned earth smelled sweet and spicy. A lawn mower, drawn by a fat, white horse, clinked across the

greensward, and watering-carts poured showers of spray over the asphalt drives. Around the statue of Peter Stuyvesant, which in 1906 had replaced the monstrosity supposed to represent Garibaldi, children played in the spring sunshine, and nurse girls wheeled elaborate baby-carriages with a reckless disregard for the pasty-faced occupants, which could probably be explained by the presence of half a dozen trim dragoon troopers languidly lolling on the benches. Through the trees the Washington Memorial Arch glistened like silver in the sunshine, and beyond, on the eastern extremity of the square, the gray-stone barracks of the dragoons and the white-granite artillery stables were alive with color and motion.

I looked at the Lethal Chamber on the corner of the square opposite. A few curious people still lingered about the gilded iron railing, but inside the grounds the paths were deserted. I watched the fountains ripple and sparkle; the sparrows had already found this new bathing nook, and the basins were crowded with the dusty-feathered little things. Two or three white peacocks picked their way across the lawns, and a drab-colored pigeon sat so motionless on the arm of one of the Fates that it seemed to be a part of the sculptured stone.

As I was turning carelessly away, a slight commotion in the group of curious loiterers around the gates attracted my attention. A young man had entered, and was advancing with nervous strides along the gravel path which leads to the bronze doors of the Lethal Chamber. He paused a moment before the Fates, and as he raised his head to those three mysterious faces, the pigeon rose from its sculptured perch, circled about for a moment, and wheeled to the east. The young man pressed his hands to his face, and then, with an undefinable gesture, sprang up the marble steps, the bronze doors closed behind him, and half an hour later the loiterers slouched away and the frightened pigeon returned to its perch in the arms of Fate.

I PUT ON MY hat and went out into the park for a little walk before dinner. As I crossed the central driveway a group of officers passed, and one of them called out, "Hello, Hildred!" and came back to shake hands with me. It was my cousin Louis, who stood smiling and tapping his spurred heels with his riding-whip.

"Just back from Westchester," he said; "been doing the bucolic; milk and curds, you know; dairymaids in sunbonnets, who say 'haeow' and 'I don't think' when you tell them they are pretty. I'm nearly dead for a

square meal at Delmonico's. What's the news?"

"There is none," I replied, pleasantly. "I saw your regiment coming in this morning."

"Did you? I didn't see you. Where were you?"

"In Mr. Wilde's window."

"Oh, hell!" he began, impatiently, "that man is stark mad! I don't understand why you . . ."

He saw how annoyed I felt by this outburst, and begged my pardon.

"Really, old chap" he said, "I don't mean to run down a man you like, but for the life of me I can't see what the deuce you find in common with Mr. Wilde. He's not well bred, to put it generously; he's hideously deformed; his head is the head of a criminally insane person. You know yourself he's been in an asylum . . ."

"So have I," I interrupted, calmly.

Louis looked startled and confused for a moment, but recovered and slapped me heartily on the shoulder.

"You were completely cured," he began; but I stopped him again.

"I suppose you mean that I was simply acknowledged never to have been insane."

"Of course that — that's what I meant," he laughed.

I disliked his laugh, because I knew it was forced; but I nodded gayly and asked him where he was going. Louis looked af-

ter his brother officers, who had now almost reached Broadway.

"We had intended to sample a Brunswick cocktail, but, to tell you the truth, I was anxious for an excuse to go and see Hawberk instead. Come along, I'll make you my excuse."

We found old Hawberk, neatly attired in a fresh spring suit, standing at the door of his shop and sniffing the air.

"I had just decided to take Constance for a little stroll before dinner," he replied to the impetuous volley of questions from Louis. "We thought of walking on the park terrace along the North River."

At that moment Constance appeared and grew pale and rosy by turns as Louis bent over her small, gloved fingers. I tried to excuse myself, alleging an engagement uptown, but Louis and Constance would not listen, and I saw I was expected to remain and engage old Hawberk's attention. After all, it would be just as well if I kept my eye on Louis, I thought, and, when they hailed a Spring Street electric-car, I got in after them and took my seat beside the armorer.

The beautiful line of parks and granite terraces overlooking the wharves along the North River, which were built in 1910 and finished in the autumn of 1917, had become one of the most popular promenades in the metropolis. They extended from

the Battery to One Hundred and Ninetieth Street, overlooking the noble river, and affording a fine view of the Jersey shore and the Highlands opposite. Cafes and restaurants were scattered here and there among the trees, and twice a week military bands from the garrison played in the kiosks on the parapets.

WE SAT DOWN in the sunshine on the bench at the foot of the equestrian statue of General Sheridan. Constance tipped her sunshade to shield her eyes, and she and Louis began a murmuring conversation which was impossible to catch. Old Hawberk, leaning on his ivory-headed cane, lighted an excellent cigar, the mate to which I politely refused, and smiled at vacancy. The sun hung low above the Staten Island woods, and the bay was dyed with golden hues reflected from the sun-warmed sails of the shipping in the harbor.

Brigs, schooners, yachts, clumsy ferry-boats, their decks swarming with people, railroad transports carrying lines of brown, blue, and white freight-cars, stately Sound steamers, *declassé* tramp steamers, coasters, dredges, scows, and everywhere pervading the entire bay impudent little tugs puffing and whistling officiously — these were the craft which churned the sunlit water as far as the eye

could reach. In calm contrast to the hurry of sailing vessel and steamer, a silent fleet of white warships lay motionless in mid-stream.

Constance's merry laugh aroused me from my reverie.

"What *are* you staring at?" she inquired.

"Nothing — the fleet." I smiled.

Then Louis told us what the vessels were, pointing out each by its relative position to the old red fort on Governor's Island.

"That little cigar-shaped thing is a torpedo-boat," he explained; "there are four more lying close together. They are the *Tarpon*, the *Falcon*, the *Sea Fox*, and the *Octopus*. The gun-boats just above are the *Prince-ton*, the *Champlain*, the *Still Water*, and the *Erie*. Next to them lie the cruisers *Farragut* and *Los Angeles*, and above them the battleships *California* and *Dakota*, and the *Washington*, which is the flagship. Those two squatty-looking chunks of metal which are anchored there off Castle William are the double-turreted monitors *Terrible* and *Magnificent*; behind them lies the ram *Osceola*."

Constance looked at him with deep approval in her beautiful eyes. "What loads of things you know for a soldier," she said, and we all joined in the laugh which followed.

Presently Louis rose with a

nod to us and offered his arm to Constance, and they strolled away along the river-wall. Hawberk watched them for a moment, and then turned to me.

"Mr. Wilde was right," he said. "I have found the missing tassets and left cuissard of the 'Prince's Emblazoned,' in a vile old junk garret in Pell Street"

"998?" I inquired, with a smile.

"Yes."

"Mr. Wilde is a very intelligent man," I observed.

"I want to give him the credit of this most important discovery," continued Hawberk. "And I intend it shall be known that he is entitled to the fame of it."

"He won't thank you for that," I answered, sharply; "please say nothing about it."

"Do you know what it is worth?" said Hawberk.

"No — fifty dollars, perhaps."

"It is valued at five hundred, but the owner of the 'Prince's Emblazoned' will give two thousand dollars to the person who completes his suit; that reward also belongs to Mr. Wilde."

"He doesn't want it! He refuses it!" I answered, angrily. "What do you know about Mr. Wilde? He doesn't need the money. He is rich — or will be — richer than any living man except myself. What will we care for money then — what will we care, he and I, when — when . . ."

"When what?" demanded Hawberk, astonished.

"You will see," I replied, on my guard again.

HE LOOKED AT me narrowly, much as Dr. Archer used to, and I knew he thought I was mentally unsound. Perhaps it was fortunate for him that he did not use the word lunatic just then.

"No," I replied to his unspoken thought, "I am not mentally weak; my mind is as healthy as Mr. Wilde's. I do not care to explain just yet what I have on hand, but it is an investment which will pay more than mere gold, silver, and precious stones. It will secure the happiness and prosperity of a continent — yes, a hemisphere!"

"Oh," said Hawberk.

"And eventually," I continued, more quietly, "it will secure the happiness of the whole world."

"And incidentally your own happiness and prosperity as well as Mr. Wilde's?"

"Exactly." I smiled, but I could have throttled him for taking that tone.

He looked at me in silence for a while, and then said, very gently: "Why don't you give up your books and studies, Mr. Castaigne, and take a tramp among the mountains somewhere or other? You used to be fond of fishing. Take a cast or

two at the trout in the Rangelys."

"I don't care for fishing any more," I answered, without a shade of annoyance in my voice.

"You used to be fond of everything," he continued — "athletics, yachting, shooting, riding . . ."

"I have never cared to ride since my fall," I said, quietly.

"Ah, yes, your fall," he repeated, looking away from me.

I thought this nonsense had gone far enough, so I turned the conversation back to Mr. Wilde; but he was scanning my face again in a manner highly offensive to me.

"Mr. Wilde," he repeated; "do you know what he did this afternoon? He came downstairs and nailed a sign over the hall door next to mine; it read:

MR. WILDE,
REPAIRER OF REPUTATIONS.
3d Bell.

Do you know what a Repairer of Reputations can be?"

"I do," I replied, suppressing the rage within.

"Oh," he said again.

Louis and Constance came strolling by and stopped to ask if we would join them. Hawberk looked at his watch. At the same moment a puff of smoke shot from the casemates of Castle William, and the boom of the sunset gun rolled across the water and was re-

echoed from the Highlands opposite. The flag came running down from the flagpole, the bugles sounded on the white decks of the warships, and the first electric light sparkled out from the Jersey shore.

As I turned into the city with Hawberk I heard Constance murmur something to Louis which I did not understand: but Louis whispered "My darling!" in reply; and again, walking ahead with Hawberk through the square, I heard a murmur of "sweetheart!" and "my own Constance!" and I knew the time had nearly arrived when I should speak of important matters with my cousin Louis.

III

ONE MORNING EARLY in May I stood before the steel safe in my bedroom, trying on the golden jewelled crown. The diamonds flashed fire as I turned to the mirror, and the heavy beaten gold burned like a halo about my head. I remembered Camilla's agonized scream and the awful words echoing through the dim streets of Carcosa. They were the last lines in the first act, and I dared not think of what followed -- dared not, even in the spring sunshine, there in my own room, surrounded with familiar objects, reassured by the bustle from the street and the voices of the servants in the

hallway outside. For those poisoned words had dropped slowly into my heart, as death-sweat drops upon a bedsheet and is absorbed.

Trembling, I put the diadem from my head and wiped my forehead, but I thought of Hastur and of my own rightful ambition, and I remembered Mr. Wilde as I had last left him, his face all torn and bloody from the claws of that devil's creature, and what he said -- ah, what he said! The alarm-bell in the safe began to whirl harshly, and I knew my time was up; but I would not heed it, and, replacing the flashing circlet upon my head, I turned defiantly to the mirror. I stood for a long time absorbed in the changing expression of my own eyes. The mirror reflected a face which was like my own, but whiter, and so thin that I hardly recognized it. And all the time I kept repeating between my clinched teeth, "The day has come! the day has come!" while the alarm in the safe whirled and clamored, and the diamonds sparkled and flamed above my brow.

I heard a door open, but did not heed it. It was only when I saw two faces in the mirror; it was only when another face rose over my shoulder, and two other eyes met mine. I wheeled like a flash and seized a long knife from my dressing-table, and my cousin sprang back very

pale, crying: "Hildred! for God's sake!" Then, as my hand fell, he said: "It is I, Louis; don't you know me?"

I stood silent. I could not have spoken for my life. He walked up to me and took the knife from my hand.

"What is all this?" he inquired, in a gentle voice. "Are you ill?"

"No," I replied. But I doubt if he heard me.

"Come, come, old fellow," he cried, "take off that brass crown and toddle into the study. Are you going to a masquerade? What's all this theatrical tinsel anyway?"

I was glad he thought the crown was made of brass and paste, yet I didn't like him any the better for thinking so. I let him take it from my hand, knowing it was best to humor him. He tossed the splendid diadem in the air, and, catching it, turned to me smiling.

"It's dear at fifty cents," he said. "What's it for?"

I did not answer, but took the circlet from his hands, and, placing it in the safe, shut the massive steel door. The alarm ceased its infernal din at once. He watched me curiously, but did not seem to notice the sudden ceasing of the alarm. He did, however, speak of the safe as a biscuit-box. Fearing lest he might examine the combination, I led the way into my study. Louis threw himself on the sofa and flicked at flies with his

eternal riding-whip. He wore his fatigue uniform, with the braided jacket and jaunty cap, and I noticed that his riding boots were all splashed with red mud.

"Where have you been?" I inquired.

"Jumping mud creeks in Jersey," he said. "I haven't had time to change yet; I was rather in a hurry to see you. Haven't you got a glass of something? I'm dead tired; been in the saddle twenty-four hours."

I GAVE HIM some brandy from my medicinal store, which he drank with a grimace.

"Damned bad stuff," he observed. "I'll give you an address where they sell brandy that is brandy."

"It's good enough for my needs," I said, indifferently. "I use it to rub my chest with." He stared and flicked at another fly.

"See here, old fellow," he began, "I've got something to suggest to you. It's four years now that you've shut yourself up here like an owl, never going anywhere, never taking any healthy exercise, never doing a damn thing but poring over those books up there on the mantelpiece."

He glanced along the row of shelves. "Napoleon, Napoleon, Napoleon!" he read. "For Heaven's sake, have you nothing but Napoleons there?"

"I wish they were bound in gold," I said. "But wait — yes, there is another book, 'The King in Yellow' "

I looked him steadily in the eye. "Have you never read it?" I asked.

"I? No, thank God! I don't want to be driven crazy."

I saw he regretted his speech as soon as he had uttered it. There is only one word which I loathe more than I do lunatic, and that word is crazy. But I controlled myself and asked him why he thought "The King in Yellow" dangerous.

"Oh, I don't know," he said, hastily. "I only remember the excitement it created and the denunciations from pulpit and press. I believe the author shot himself after bringing forth this monstrosity, didn't he?"

"I understand he is still alive," I answered.

"That's probably true," he muttered; "bullets couldn't kill a fiend like that."

"It is a book of great truths," I said.

"Yes," he replied, "of 'truths' which send men frantic and blast their lives. I don't care if the thing is, as they say, the very supreme essence of art. It's a crime to have written it, and I for one shall never open its pages."

"Is that what you have come to tell me?" I asked.

"No," he said, "I came to tell

you that I am going to be married."

I believe for a moment my heart ceased to beat, but I kept my eyes on his face.

"Yes," he continued, smiling happily, "married to the sweetest girl on earth."

"Constance Hawberk," I said mechanically.

"How did you know?" he cried, astonished. "I didn't know it myself until that evening last April, when we strolled down to the embankment before dinner."

"When is it to be?" I asked.

"It was to have been next September; but an hour ago a despatch came, ordering our regiment to the Presidio, San Francisco. We leave at noon tomorrow. Tomorrow," he repeated. "Just think, Hildred, tomorrow I shall be the happiest fellow that ever drew breath in this jolly world, for Constance will go with me."

I offered him my hand in congratulation, and he seized and shook it like the good-natured fool he was — or pretended to be.

"I am going to get my squadron as a wedding present," he rattled on. "Captain and Mrs. Louis Castaigne — eh, Hildred?"

Then he told me where it was to be and who were to be there. and made me promise to come and be best man. I set my teeth and listened to his boyish chat-

ter without showing what I felt, but . . .

I WAS GETTING to the limit of my endurance, and when he jumped up, and, switching his spurs till they jingled, said he must go, I did not detain him.

"There's one thing I want to ask of you," I said, quietly.

Out with it — it's promised," he laughed.

"I want you to meet me for a quarter of an hour's talk to-night."

"Of course, if you wish," he said, somewhat puzzled. "Where?"

"Anywhere — in the park there."

"What time, Hildred?"

"Midnight."

"What in the name of . . ." he began, but checked himself and laughingly assented. I watched him go down the stairs and hurry away, his sabre banging at every stride. He turned into Bleeker Street, and I knew he was going to see Constance. I gave him ten minutes to disappear and then followed in his footsteps, taking with me the jewelled crown and the silken robe embroidered with the Yellow Sign. When I turned into Bleeker Street and entered the doorway which bore the sign,

I saw old Hawberk moving about in his shop, and imagined I heard Constance's voice in the parlor; but I avoided them both and hurried up the trembling stairways to Mr. Wilde's apartment. I knocked, and entered without ceremony. Mr. Wilde lay groaning on the floor, his face covered with blood, his clothes torn to shreds. Drops of blood were scattered about over the carpet, which had also been ripped and frayed in the evidently recent struggle.

"It's that cursed cat," he said, ceasing his groans and turning his colorless eye to me; "she attacked me while I was asleep. I believe she will kill me yet."

This was too much, so I went into the kitchen and, seizing a hatchet from the pantry, started to find the infernal beast and settle her then and there. My search was fruitless, and after a while I gave it up and came back to find Mr. Wilde squatting on his high chair by the table. He had washed his face and changed his clothes. The great furrows which the cat's claws had ploughed up in his face he had filled with collodion, and a rag hid the wound in his throat. I told him I should kill the cat when I came across her, but he only shook his head and turned to the open ledger before him. He read name after name of the people who had come to him in regard to their

MR. WILDE,
REPAIRER OF REPUTATIONS.
3d Bell,

reputation, and the sums he had amassed were startling.

"I put on the screws now and then," he explained.

"One day or other some of these peopel will assassinate you," I insisted.

"Do you think so?" he said, rubbing his mutilated ears.

It was useless to argue with him, so I took down the manuscript entitled Imperial Dynasty of America for the last time I should ever take it down in Mr. Wilde's study. I read it through, thrilling and trembling with pleasure. When I had finished, Mr. Wilde took the manuscript, and, turning to the dark passage which leads from his study to his bedchamber, called out, in a loud voice, "Vance." Then for the first time I noticed a man crouching there in the shadow. How I had overlooked him during my search for the cat I cannot imagine.

"Vance, come in!" cried Mr. Wilde.

THE FIGURE ROSE and crept towards us, and I shall never forget the face he raised to mine as the light from the window illuminated it.

"Vance, this is Mr. Castaigne," said Mr. Wilde. Before he had finished speaking, the man threw himself on the ground before the table, crying and gasping, "Oh, God! Oh, my God! Help me! Forgive me . . . Oh, Mr. Castaigne, keep that man

away! You cannot, you cannot mean it! You are different — save me! I am broken down — I was in a madhouse, and now — when all was coming right — when I had forgotten the King — the King in Yellow, and — but I shall go mad again — I shall go mad . . ."

His voice died into a choking rattle, for Mr. Wilde had leaped on him, and his right hand encircled the man's throat. When Vance fell in a heap on the floor, Mr. Wilde clambered nimbly into his chair again, and, rubbing his mangled ears with the stump of his hand, turned to me and asked me for the ledger. I reached it down from the shelf and he opened it. After a moment's searching among the beautifully written pages, he coughed complacently and pointed to the name Vance.

"Vance," he read, aloud — "Osgood Oswald Vance."

At the sound of his name the man on the floor raised his head and turned a convulsed face to Mr. Wilde. His eyes were injected with blood, his lips tumefied. "Called April 28th," continued Mr. Wilde. "Occupation, cashier in the Seaforth National Bank; has served a term for forgery at Sing Sing, whence he was transferred to the Asylum for the Criminal Insane. Pardoned by the Governor of New York, and discharged from the Asylum January 19, 1918. Reputation damaged at Sheepshead

Bay. Rumors that he lives beyond his income. Reputation to be repaired at once. Retainer, \$1500.

"Note — Has embezzled sums amounting to \$30,000 since March 20, 1919. Excellent family, and secured present position through uncle's influence. Father, President of Seaforth Bank."

I looked at the man on the floor.

"Get up, Vance," said Mr. Wilde, in a gentle voice. Vance rose as if hypnotized.

"He will do as we suggest now," observed Mr. Wilde, and, opening the manuscript, he read the entire history of the Imperial Dynasty of America. Then, in a kind and soothing murmur, he ran over the important points with Vance, who stood like one stunned. His eyes were so blank and vacant that I imagined he had become half-witted, and remarked it to Mr. Wilde, who replied that it was of no consequence anyway. Very patiently we pointed out to Vance what his share in the affair would be, and he seemed to understand after a while. Mr. Wilde explained the manuscript, using several volumes on Heraldry to substantiate the result of his researches. He mentioned the establishment of the Dynasty in Carcosa, the lakes which connected Hastur, Aldebaran, and the mystery of the Hyades. He spoke of Cassilda and Camilla, and sounded the cloudy

depths of Demhe and the Lake of Hali. "The scalloped tatters of the King in Yellow must hide Yhtill forever," he muttered, but I do not believe Vance heard him.

Then by degrees he led Vance along the ramifications of the imperial family to Uoht and Thale, from Naotalba and Phantom of Truth to Aldones, and then, tossing aside his manuscript and notes, he began the wonderful story of the Last King. Fascinated and thrilled, I watched him. He threw up his head, his long arms were stretched out in a magnificent gesture of pride and power, and his eyes blazed deep in their sockets like two emeralds. Vance listened, stupified. As for me, when at last Mr. Wilde had finished, and, pointing to me, cried, "The cousin of the King," my head swam with excitement.

Controlling myself with a superhuman effort, I explained to Vance why I alone was worthy of the crown, and why my cousin must be exiled or die. I made him understand that my cousin must never marry, even after renouncing all his claims, and how that, least of all he should marry the daughter of the Marquis of Avonshire and bring England into the question. I showed him a list of thousands of names which Mr. Wilde had drawn up; every man whose name was there had received the Yellow Sign, which

no living human being dared disregard. The city, the State, the whole land, were ready to rise and tremble before the Pallid Mask.

The time had come, the people should know the son of Hastur, and the whole world bow to the black stars which hang in the sky over Carcosa.

VANCE LEANED ON the table, his head buried in his hands. Mr. Wilde drew a rough sketch on the margin of yesterday's *Herald* with a bit of lead-pencil. It was a plan of Hawberk's rooms. Then he wrote out the order and affixed the seal, and, shaking like a palsied man, I signed my first writ of execution with my name Hildred-Rex.

Mr. Wilde clambered to the floor and, unlocking the cabinet, took a long, square box from the first shelf. This he brought to the table and opened. A new knife lay in the tissue-paper inside, and I picked it up and handed it to Vance, along with the order and the plan of Hawberk's apartment. Then Mr. Wilde told Vance he could go; and he went, shambling like an outcast of the slums.

I sat for a while watching the daylight fade behind the square tower of the Judson Memorial Church, and finally, gathering up the manuscript and notes, took my hat and started for the door.

Mr. Wilde watched me in silence. When I had stepped into the hall I looked back; Mr. Wilde's small eyes were fixed on me. Behind him the shadow gathered in the fading light. Then I closed the door behind me and went out into the darkening streets.

I had eaten nothing since breakfast, but I was not hungry. A wretched, half-starved creature, who stood looking across the street at the Lethal Chamber, noticed me and came up to tell me a tale of misery. I gave him money — I don't know why — and he went away without thanking me. An hour later another outcast approached and whined his story. I had a blank bit of paper in my pocket, on which was traced the Yellow Sign, and I handed it to him. He looked at it stupidly for a moment, and then, with an uncertain glance at me, folded it with what seemed to me exaggerated care and placed it in his bosom.

The electric lights were sparkling among the trees, and the new moon shone in the sky above the Lethal Chamber. It was tiresome waiting in the square; I wandered from the marble arch to the artillery stables, and back again to the lotos fountain. The flowers and grass exhaled a fragrance which troubled me. The jet of the fountain played in the moonlight; and the musical splash of

falling drops reminded me of the tinkle of chained mail in Hawberk's shop. But it was not as fascinating, and the dull sparkle of the moonlight on the water brought no such sensations of exquisite pleasure as when the sunshine played over the polished steel of a corselet on Hawberk's knee. I watched the bats darting and turning above the water plants in the fountain basin, but their rapid, jerky flight set my nerves on edge, and I went away again to walk aimlessly to and fro among the trees.

The artillery stables were dark, but in the cavalry barracks the officers' windows were brilliantly lighted, and the sally-port was constantly filled with troopers in fatigue, carrying straw and harness and baskets filled with tin dishes.

Twice the mounted sentry at the gates was changed while I wandered up and down the asphalt walk. I looked at my watch. It was nearly time. The lights in the barracks went out one by one, the barred gate was closed, and every minute or two an officer passed through the side wicket, leaving a rattle of accoutrements and a jingle of spurs on the night air. The square had become very silent. The last homeless loiterer had been driven away by the gray-coated park policeman, the car tracks along Wooster Street were deserted, and the only

sound which broke the stillness was the stamping of the sentry's horse and the ring of his sabre against the saddle pommel. In the barracks the officers' quarters were still lighted, and military servants passed and re-passed before the bay-windows. Twelve o'clock sounded from the new spire of St. Francis Xavier, and at the last stroke of the sad-toned bell a figure passed through the wicket beside the portcullis, returned the salute of the sentry, and, crossing the street, entered the square and advanced towards the Benedick apartment house.

"Louis," I called.

THE MAN PIVOTED on his spurred heels and came straight towards me.

"Is that you, Hildred?"

"Yes, you are on time."

I took his offered hand and we strolled towards the Lethal Chamber.

He rattled on about his wedding and the graces of Constance and their future prospects, calling my attention to his captain's shoulder-straps and the triple gold arabesque on his sleeve and fatigue cap. I believe I listened as much to the music of his spurs and sabre as I did to his boyish babble, and at last we stood under the elms on the Fourth Street corner of the square opposite the Lethal Chamber. Then he laughed and asked me what I

wanted with him. I motioned him to a seat on a bench under the electric light, and sat down beside him. He looked at me curiously, with that same searching glance which I hate and fear so in doctors. I felt the insult of his look, but he did not know it, and I carefully concealed my feelings.

"Well, old chap," he inquired, "what can I do for you?"

I drew from my pocket the manuscript and notes of the Imperial Dynasty of America, and, looking him in the eye, said:

"I will tell you. On your word as a soldier, promise me to read this manuscript from beginning to end without asking me a question. Promise me to read these notes in the same way, and promise me to listen to what I have to tell later."

"I promise, if you wish it," he said, pleasantly. "Give me the paper, Hildred."

He began to read, raising his eyebrows with a puzzled, whimsical air, which made me tremble with suppressed anger. As he advanced, his eyebrows contracted, and his lips seemed to form the word "rubbish."

Then he looked slightly bored, but apparently for my sake read, with an attempt at interest, which presently ceased to be an effort. He started when, in the closely written pages he came to his own name, and when he came to mine he

lowered the paper and looked sharply at me for a moment. But he kept his word, and resumed his reading, and I let the half-formed question die on his lips unanswered. When he came to the end and read the signature of Mr. Wilde, he folded the paper carefully and returned it to me. I handed him the notes, and he settled back, pushing his fatigue cap up to his forehead with a boyish gesture which I remembered so well in school. I watched his face as he read, and when he finished I took the notes, with the manuscript, and placed them in my pocket. Then I unfolded a scroll marked with the Yellow Sign. He saw the sign, but he did not seem to recognize it, and I called his attention to it somewhat sharply.

"Well," he said, "I see it. What is it?"

"It is the Yellow Sign," I said angrily.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Louis, in that flattering voice which Dr. Archer used to employ with me, and would probably have employed again, had I not settled his affair for him.

I kept my rage down and answered as steadily as possible, "Listen, you have engaged your word?"

"I am listening, old chap," he replied, soothingly.

I BEGAN TO SPEAK very calmly: "Dr. Archer, having by

some means become possessed of the secret of the Imperial Succession, attempted to deprive me of my right, alleging that, because of a fall from my horse four years ago, I had become mentally deficient. He presumed to place me under restraint in his own house in hopes of either driving me insane or poisoning me. I have not forgotten it. I visited him last night and the interview was final."

Louis turned quite pale, but did not move. I resumed, triumphantly: "There are yet three people to be interviewed in the interests of Mr. Wilde and myself. They are my cousin Louis, Mr. Hawberk, and his daughter Constance."

Louis sprang to his feet, and I arose also, and flung the paper marked with the Yellow Sign to the ground.

"Oh, I don't need that to tell you what I have to say," I cried, with a laugh of triumph. "You must renounce the crown to me — do you hear, to me?"

Louis looked at me with a startled air, but, recovering himself, said kindly, "Of course I renounce the — what is it I must renounce?"

"The crown," I said, angrily.

"Of course," he answered, "I renounce it. Come, old chap, I'll walk back to your rooms with you."

"Don't try any of your doctor's tricks on me," I cried,

trembling with fury. "Don't act as if you think I am insane."

"What nonsense!" he replied. "Come, it's getting late, Hildred."

"No," I shouted, "you must listen. You cannot marry; I forbid it. Do you hear? I forbid it. You shall renounce the crown, and in reward I grant you exile; but if you refuse you shall die."

He tried to calm me, but I was roused at last, and, drawing my long knife, barred his way.

Then I told him how they would find Dr. Archer in the cellar with his throat open, and I laughed in his face when I thought of Vance and his knife, and the order signed by me.

"Ah, you are the King," I cried, "but I shall be King. Who are you to keep me from empire over all the habitable earth! I was born the cousin of a king, but I shall be King!"

Louis stood white and rigid before me. Suddenly a man came running up Fourth Street, entered the gate of the Lethal Temple, traversed the path to the bronze doors at full speed, and plunged into the death-chamber with the cry of one demented, and I laughed until I wept tears, for I had recognized Vance, and knew that Hawberk and his daughter were no longer in my way.

"Go," I cried to Louis, "you have ceased to be a menace. You will never marry Constance now, and if you marry any one

else in your exile, I will visit you as I did my doctor last night. Mr. Wilde takes charge of you tomorrow." Then I turned and darted into South Fifth Avenue, and with a cry of terror Louis dropped his belt and sabre and followed me like the wind. I heard him close behind me at the corner of Bleecker Street, and I dashed into the doorway under Hawberk's sign. He cried, "Halt, or I fire!" but when he saw that I flew up the stairs leaving Hawberk's shop below, he left me, and I heard him hammering and shouting at their door as though it were possible to arouse the dead.

MR. WILDE'S DOOR was open, and I entered, crying: "It is done, it is done! Let the nations rise and look upon their King!" but I could not find Mr. Wilde, so I went to the cabinet and took the splendid diadem from its case. Then I drew on the white silk robe, embroidered with the Yellow Sign, and placed the crown upon my head. At last I was King, King by my right in Hastur, King because I knew the mystery of the Hyades, and my mind had sounded the depths of the Lake of Heli. I was King! The first gray pencillings of dawn would raise a tempest which would shake two hemispheres. Then as I stood, my every nerve pitched to the highest tension, faint with the joy and splendor of my

thought, without, in the dark passage, a man groaned.

I seized the tallow dip and sprang to the door. The cat passed me like a demon, and the tallow dip went out, but my long knife flew swifter than she, and I heard her screech, and I knew that my knife had found her. For a moment I listened to her tumbling and thumping about in the darkness, and then, when her frenzy ceased, I lighted a lamp and raised it over my head. Mr. Wilde lay on the floor with his throat torn open. At first I thought he was dead, but as I looked a green sparkle came into his sunken eyes, his mutilated hand trembled, and then a spasm stretched his mouth from ear to ear. For a moment my terror and despair gave place to hope, but as I bent over him his eyeballs rolled clean around in his head, and he died.

Then, while I stood transfixed with rage and despair, seeing my crown, my empire, every hope and every ambition, my very life, lying prostrate there with the dead master, *they* came, seized me from behind and bound me until my veins stood out like cords, and my voice failed with the paroxysms of my frenzied screams. But I still raged, bleeding and infuriated, among them, and more than one policeman felt my sharp teeth. Then when I

could no longer move they came nearer; I saw old Hawberk, and behind him my cousin Louis' ghastly face, and farther away, in the corner, a woman, Constance, weeping softly.

"Ah! I see it now!" I shrieked.

"You have seized the throne and the empire. Woe! woe to you who are crowned with the crown of the King in Yellow!"

[EDITOR'S NOTE. — Mr. Castaigne died yesterday in the Asylum for Criminal Insane.]



If You Missed Our First or Second Issues

There are still a few copies left.

The August issue contained:

- The Man With A Thousand Legs*, by Frank Belknap Long
- A Thing Of Beauty*, by Wallace West
- The Yellow Sign*, by Robert W. Chambers
- The Maze And The Monster*, by Edward D. Hoch
- The Death Of Halpin Frayser*, by Ambrose Bierce
- Babylon: 70 M.*, by Donald A. Wollheim
- The Inexperienced Ghost*, by H. C. Wells
- The Unbeliever*, by Robert Silverberg
- Fidel Bassin*, by W. J. Stamper
- The Last Dawn*, by Frank Lillie Pollock, and
- The Undying Head*, by Mark Twain

The November issue contained:

- The Space-Eaters*, by Frank Belknap Long
- The Faceless Thing*, by Edward D. Hoch
- The Red Room*, by H. G. Wells
- Hungary's Female Vampire*, by Dean Lipton
- A Tough Tussle*, by Ambrose Bierce
- Doorslammer*, by Donald A. Wollheim
- The Electric Chair*, by George Waight
- The Other One*, by Jerry L. Keane
- The Charmer*, by Archie Binns
- Clarissa*, by Robert A. W. Lowndes, and
- The Strange Ride Of Morrowble Jukes*, by Rudyard Kipling

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Enclosed please find———for a copy of your August— November— issue. (Please check issues you want. 50c per copy.)

Coming Next Issue

Gilman's dreams consisted largely in plunges through limitless abysses of inexplicably colored twilight and bafflingly disordered sound; abysses whose material and gravitational properties, and whose relation to his own entity, he could not even begin to explain. He did not walk or climb, fly or swim, crawl or wriggle; yet always experienced a mode of motion partly involuntary. Of his own condition he could not well judge, for sight of his arms, legs, and torso seemed always cut off by some odd disarrangement of perspective; but he felt that his physical organization and faculties were somehow marvellously transmuted and obliquely projected—though not without a certain grotesque relationship to his normal proportions and properties.

The abysses were by no means vacant, being crowded with indescribably angled masses of alien-hued substance, some of which appeared to be organic while others seemed inorganic. A few of the organic objects tended to awake vague memories in the back of his mind, though he could form no conscious idea of what they mockingly resembled or suggested. In the later dreams he began to distinguish separate categories into which the organic objects appeared to be divided, and which seemed to involve in each case, a radically different species of conduct-pattern and basic motivation. Of these categories one seemed to him to include objects slightly less illogical and irrelevant in their motions than the members of the other categories.

All the objects—organic and inorganic alike—were totally beyond description or even comprehension. Gilman sometimes compared the inorganic masses to prisms, labyrinths, clusters of cubes and planes, and cyclopean buildings; and the organic things struck him variously as groups of bubbles, octopi, centipedes, living Hindu idols, and intricate Arabesques roused into a kind of ophidian animation. Everything he saw was unspeakably menacing and horrible; and whenever one of the organic entities appeared by its motions to be noticing him, he felt a stark, hideous fright which generally jolted him awake. Of how the organic entities moved, he could tell no more than of how he moved himself. In time, he observed a further mystery—the tendency of certain entities to appear suddenly out of empty space, or to disappear totally with equal suddenness. ...

You will not want to miss this story of mathematics, witchcraft, and Walpurgis Night, in which the horror creeps and grows.

THE DREAMS IN THE WITCH-HOUSE

by H.P. Lovecraft

It is Written . . .

WHILE A FEW of the many readers who have written in have said, "please do not waste space with a letter department", the majority of you who have brought up the subject most definitely desired it. We shall not, however, as some of the opponents feared, crowd out any stories in order to make room for letters. As most of you suggested, we shall keep the comments brief, and confine the department to a few pages.

Grayce B. Confer, of San Bernardino, Cal., writes: "For a long time I have felt there was a need for some publication that would include unusual tales. I am sure I am not the only person who is tired of the customary romantic hogwash or super-realistic sex treatment crowding so many of our current periodicals, although I would be the first to stand up and cheer for both love and sex. The superficial, saccharine, or sadistic approach each succeeding writer tries to imitate — no."

It has been gratifying to hear from so many tried and true readers of weird, horror, and imaginative fiction — but even more gratifying to note the number of letters of appreciation coming from readers who, apparently, are not established *aficionados*.

"Starting with the cover," writes David Charles Paskow, of Philadelphia, "I like it and feel that you should not have an illustrated cover. Instead, stick to various designs — they lend an air of sophistication . . . and give the magazine a handsome appearance."

"Your choice of stories for your first issue, I feel was excellent. Frank Long's story rather surprised me. I was positive I wouldn't enjoy it . . . but was pleasantly (or rather horrifyingly) surprised. Robert Silverberg's story was very amusing (you're right; that theme never grows stale) as was Wells'. Frank Pollock's tale gave me a shudder or two, but the star of the whole issue was, in my opinion, "The Yellow Sign" by Robert W. Chambers. Hunt up some more of his writings, please!"

There have been many requests for more material by Robert W. Chambers, particularly the other stories from *The King In Yellow*. In this issue, we present the less widely-known, *Repairer Of Reputations*, which opens the collection; we hope to offer you the third, and last, of the stories dealing with the King in Yellow in a later issue.

A California reader, whose name is withheld by request, writes: "Frankly, I don't like the title of the magazine, or the cover layout and color scheme. Although I am a comic book buyer, among other things, *Magazine Of Horror* is the first magazine I've felt ashamed to take up to the drugstore cashier in many long years. . . . I don't expect you to change the title, but couldn't you use a more subdued color scheme in future issues? . . . And how about using story blurbs on the cover, in the fashion of the old *Unknown Worlds*?"

We have to raise our voice a little, as it were, to get any attention at all on the newsstands (except, perhaps, for people who are constantly on the lookout for magazines of our nature; alas, there are not enough of such people). We were frankly astonished that even a few considered the cover of our first issue gaudy.

"I know you are going to hear from the usual Lovecraft-Merritt-Kuttner groups," writes J. W. Daley, of Jamaica Plains, Mass., "and if you start using that stuff you are also going to meet the inevitable fate of other magazines

which published the works of these stereotyped mimics. . . . Whatever you do please! please! please! no Merritt, no Lovecraft, no C. L. Moore, no Howard, etc. Once you start on these people you will be just another version of the same old thing."

This letter was among the first we received, and Mr. Daley was prophetic, since we have received many, many requests — many pleas — for Lovecraft material, and all the others he mentions have also been requested. We shall heed his plea, certainly, to the extent of not letting any single type of weird or horror story dominate the magazine, issue after issue. And we shall try not to bring you the most widely-reprinted works of these authors — so far as magazine presentations go. But we hope that Mr. Daley will bear with us if we accede to other requests and offer an occasional, lesser known Lovecraft tale.

"I hope you do not reprint any science-fiction at all," writes Scott Kutina of Cleveland, Ohio. "There are five magazines now, with all-science-fiction formats, and there are two which print about half-and-half. Keep yours straight fantasy. Please?"

We certainly do not want to try to compete with the science-fiction magazines on their own grounds; but your response to the question of offering an occasional story as far removed from them as *The Last Dawn* so far, has been very approving. We should like to hear from more of you on this subject; do you want to see anything suggestive of science fiction excluded entirely, or will you tolerate an occasional story which *might* go in the science fiction category, but is fundamentally a horror story, strange tale, etc.?

"I'm not much for having articles," writes Richard A. Frank of Williamsport, Penna. "Your true occult magazine takes care of these — but I would like to see a continuation of De Camp's "Round About The Cauldron", many parts of which you ran in your previous science fiction magazines. . . . Please keep the magazine *all* stories, as in this issue."

Reader's Preference Coupon

(there's more space on the flip side)

I liked the following items best in the February issue:

I did not care for the following items:

This plea reached us some time after we had accepted Dean Lipton's article on Countess Bathory for our second issue. We shall wait to hear your viewpoints before deciding whether to consider articles for future issues. Mr. Frank also urged an increasing proportion of new stories, but Paul A. Scaramanza, of Union City, New Jersey, takes the opposite view: "As for whether you should print mainly reprints or new stories," he writes, "stick to the reprints. They are *good* stories, and their like just isn't being written today."

Mrs. S. E. Bradford, of San Fernando, California, writes: "You have selections that greatly pleased me. I will greedily grab every copy that is to come. My only dislike was H. G. Wells' *Inexperienced Ghost*. Having read it in about four other anthologies, I agree it's pretty good reading *but* — *all* of his works are known to *every* one who's a true reader. Stick to the lesser-known authors . . ."

All of Wells' short stories are not quite so readily available as you might suppose; it took us over a year to locate a copy of the out-of-print complete short stories. The science fiction short stories have been reprinted many times, and are now pretty well available in soft-cover editions, costing the same, or little more than an issue of this magazine. Many readers who would enjoy his "strange" stories cannot afford, or cannot obtain copies of anthologies containing them.

Readers, what are your favorite stories in this issue? Are there any stories you disliked? Any stories you would like to see reprinted? If you suggest one which is not already on our list, and we can use it, we'll thank you in the blurb when we run it, and send you a complimentary copy of the issue in which it appears. (If you're a subscriber, we'll extend your subscription one issue.) The coupon is for convenience only; you do not have to use it in order to have your votes or suggestions counted.

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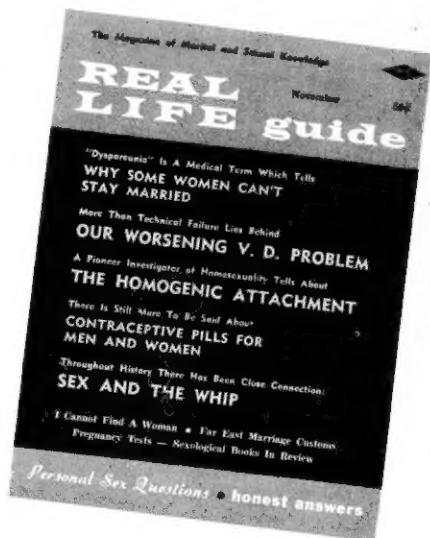
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